The multi award-winning ***MULTIFORMAT*** *games magazine* £4 www.gamestm.co.uk 43




eMag

Addiction… We all suffer it in one form or another; whether it's our favourite sport, the movies, must-see TV, videogames or something else. Until last month, for me at least, it had been US event drama *Lost*, the superb *24* and the sport of gentleman: golf. And yet somehow, without any warning, without any mercy and with many a sleepless night since, I became (and still am) addicted to a game within a genre I had previously never given the time of day. I refer, of course, to *Oblivion* which is, ironically, where my social life has been cast to. I found myself playing obsessive hours, unable to put the joypad down, often to the point of bloodshot eyes, confused looks from my friends and the odd late arrival to work in the morning. Further still, I catch myself talking about goblins, finding a cure for Vampirism (which seemed cool at the time but, you know, daylight sucks), making potions and slaying Minotaurs – much to the amusement of those around me. I've not been this addicted to a game since the days of *Championship Manager 2*! Really, I should see sense and go out into the light and embrace the outside world… but not before joining the Dark Brotherhood, becoming Arena Champion and, well, everything else I guess.

Paul Morgan

Paul Morgan
Editor







CONTENTS

FEATURES

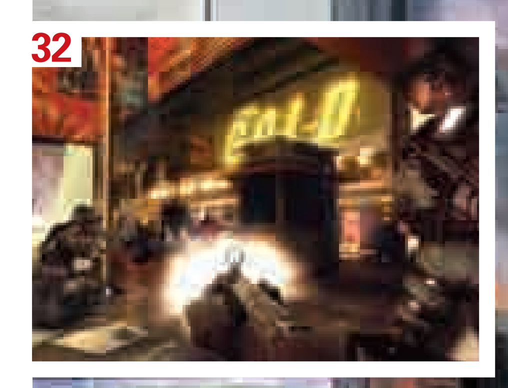
REGULARS

PREVIEWS

REVIEWS

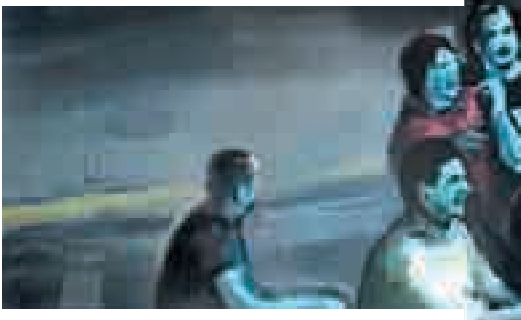
RETRO

32

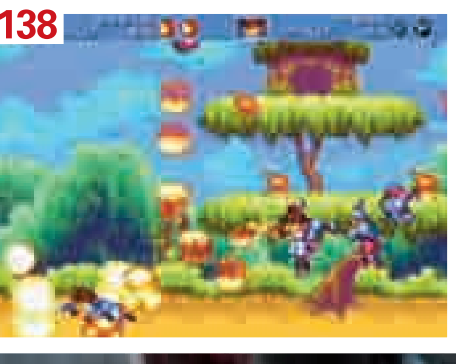




111



138




games™ visits the legendary studio on its own turf
86
Capcom

NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION

CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

BE AFRAID, BE VERY AFRAID

SONY FINALLY COMES CLEAN ON PLAYSTATION3

Now that the dust has finally settled on the eventful launch of the Xbox 360, gamers across the globe have had a chance to acclimatise to the warming glow of the next generation, and for many the temptation of the shiny new technology is such that the oft-delayed PlayStation3 suddenly seemed like it might not be worth the wait. Of course, in business timing is everything – it's an immutable truth, and one that Sony is more than aware of. No sooner had the dissenting voices begun their pessimistic tirade than the news finally arrived: the PlayStation3 is coming, and it's coming this November.

The long-awaited announcement was delivered by Sony Computer Entertainment boss Ken Kutaragi at the PlayStation business briefing which was held in Tokyo in March. Kutaragi outlined plans for a simultaneous worldwide release at the end of this year, just in time for the Christmas period, and smashing rumours that a staggered release would see the PlayStation3 delayed in Europe until some time in 2007.

Sony claims that the final development hardware will be ready in June when production will start on an estimated two million units to be ready for the release date, with a further six million to be shipped by March 2007. While the targets certainly seem ambitious, they are not outside the realms of possibility, and Sony will be doing all that it can to avoid the stock shortages that blighted the Xbox 360's entrance on the next-gen scene.

With a less than glittering record for meeting its deadlines, Sony's November release date is likely to be hotly contested. However, the news has, by and large, been well received by game developers who see this as an opportunity to perfect their PlayStation3 products. A spokesperson from Konami stated that, "It's very good that the release period has been clarified. We think that the delay will give everyone enough time to make sure we deliver better quality in our games".

Word on the other side of the fence is equally optimistic, with Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer seeing the news as a chance for the Xbox 360 to tighten its grip on the next-generation market. "In every other generation, the first guy to 10 million consoles was the number one seller in the generation," he claimed. "Did we just get an even better opportunity to be the first guy to 10 million? Yeah, of course we did."



AND THAT'S NOT ALL

THE NEW LOWDOWN ON THE PS3

“**SONY** WILL DO ALL IT CAN TO **AVOID THE STOCK SHORTAGES** THAT **BLIGHTED** THE **XBOX 360'S** ENTRANCE ON THE SCENE”

TAKE THAT, MICROSOFT



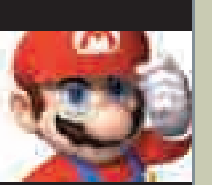
PlayStation3 will boast a free online service.

In news that will have Microsoft feeling uncomfortable, Sony has announced that the PS3 will come with a 60Gb Hard Drive – which can also be upgraded – as standard. The drive will go some way to achieving Sony's ideal of the PS3 becoming a home media server, and will handsomely support its online service.

As well as the Hard Drive coming as part of the package, the online service will also be free – a big worry for Microsoft whose complementary Xbox Live Silver service allows similar services to Sony's but doesn't grant access to online multi-player gaming.

The PS3's online capabilities will be available from launch, and will include services such as lobbies, player matching and voice chat, while the Hard Drive will enable content to be purchased and stored, which brings us to…

BATTLE OF THE BACK CATALOGUES

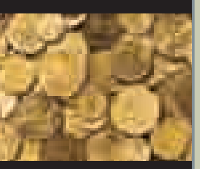


Sony and Nintendo will digitally distribute classic titles.

Not only will PS3 be backwards compatible, but Sony may also make its back catalogue available for digital distribution. The system would be like that proposed for the Revolution, which will allow the user to purchase and download NES, SNES and N64 titles.

The success of such a system is its capacity to store games. Fine for Nintendo – most of whose titles will take up just a few megabytes – but a problem for Sony as PS2 games may need multiple gigabytes of memory. Increased download speeds and Hard Drive upgrades should remove this problem, and Sony is unlikely to miss out on a chance to exploit its superb back catalogue, taking on its rivals in a new, relatively unexploited marketplace.

SHARING THE WEALTH



The PS3 signals wealthy times ahead for game developers.

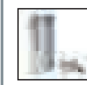
And the general feeling of levity didn't stop with the fans as share prices of many leading games publishers rose across the board as a result of the news. Along with a number of smaller developers, EA, Activision, THQ and Take2 all benefited from the announcement.

Analysts had predicted that the PS3 would not hit Europe until 2007 and miss out on the all-important Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays in the US. With such fears laid to rest, the games sector has been shown renewed confidence by the financial authorities so ready to bemoan its decline.

The fact that share prices were affected despite Sony missing its initial Spring 2006 deadline, speaks volumes for the levels of anticipation felt within the industry at the console's arrival, which have dwarfed those shown toward the Xbox 360 at every stage.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SMALL CONCERN

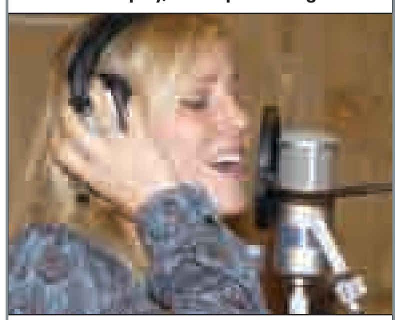
In an announcement completely free of any solid evidence, Dean Takahashi, the author of a forthcoming book on the launch of Xbox 360, has indicated that Microsoft is hard at work on a handheld console. Few would doubt the validity of the claim as Microsoft will inevitably want to compete with the DS and the PSP, but Takahashi goes so far as to say it will be geared toward entertainment, playing movies, games and music, as well as having its own iTunes-style music store. Ah, speculation, where would videogames news be without it.





FREE BEDINGFIELD

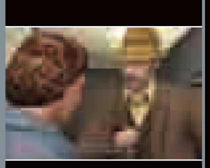
Natasha Bedingfield doesn't inhabit the same intellectual space as your average Xbox user, yet Microsoft has chosen her song *Unwritten* to launch its new, free music video download service. More will be added to the 360 Marketplace every month, with a handful of lucky gamers selected to go head-to-head with the 'Artist Of The Month'. Microsoft has not offered any comment on whether the next artist will be someone gamers actually want to play, but hopes are high.





BAFTA GROWS THIRD ARM

AWARDS BODY ELEVATES GAMES TO EQUAL STATUS WITH FILM AND TELEVISION



The Godfather has made a perfectly good transition from film to game.

The ever-growing number of game-to-film and film-to-game adaptations has prompted much discussion recently about the increasingly blurred lines between the two media. Ambitious licences like EA's *The Godfather*, high-profile Hollywood productions like the forthcoming *Halo*, and the grand, cinematic sweep of the *GTA* series have turned the topic into something of a cause célèbre, and provided some much-needed page-filler for us journos.



Now, in an announcement set to resurrect the debate all over again, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) has elevated the status of the gaming sector to equal that of film and television. The revamped British Academy Video Games Awards will now take place in October this year, marking the climax of London Games Week, and pushing the new set of events to the very pinnacle of the European gaming calendar. A newly formed committee of industry representatives, including publishers, developers, middleware companies and trade associations, will judge the awards.

Such a forward-thinking approach is likely to work wonders for BAFTA's growing profile on the awards circuit as it struggles to distinguish itself in the shadow of US giants, the Oscars, Emmys and Golden Globes. As the UK's first major platform for awarding excellence in videogames, public perception of the industry should also take a sharp turn for the better.

The committee is led by Paul Jackson, managing director of Northern Region Electronic Arts, who stated, "The organisation is perfectly positioned to cross-fertilise opportunities, set benchmarks

for measurement, and champion creative standards to encourage new and compelling interactive experiences".

Similar sentiments were echoed right across the board, with Ray Maguire, vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment, adding, "For the creativity and artistry that is so prevalent in our business to be recognised in parity with other, more accepted visual arts, says to me that interactivity has finally come of age".

While such assertions on the maturity of the industry are still a little ambiguous, the raised profile of the awards marks an important step on the medium's path toward mainstream acceptance. "Videogames constitute a hugely significant new, moving image art form that sits alongside film and television in its power to entertain and educate," said Duncan Kenworthy, BAFTA's chairman. "The Academy is determined to encourage its development… to the benefit of those who create games and those who play them."

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

With increased backing from BAFTA, the awards have arguably become the most prestigious and independent in the world. Judges from companies like Sega, EA, Ubisoft, Eidos and Activision will award prizes for achievement in a range of genres and technical disciplines. Oh, and don't shout it but the word on the street is that the ceremony will be hosted by none other than that floppy-haired, awards-whore Jonathon Ross. Now that is prestige!





VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES BAN

NEWS FROM THE SOUTH

It's one of the most frustrating things in life. Just as you start to think that everybody is reading from the same hymn sheet, seeing eye-to-eye and ready to make progress, some silly senator from Tennessee comes along and ruins it. Well, they aren't always senators, or from Tennessee, but it's still bloody annoying.

The senator in question is one Tommy Kilby. His proposal seeks to ban the sale of violent videogames to anyone of any age in the state of Tennessee, claiming that the bill represents the interests of local parents and law enforcers. His thoughts on the interests of every other person living in Tennessee are as yet unclear.

The bill outlines certain attributes that a game must possess to be considered "extremely violent", and states, "a videogame in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being". Whether the sexual assault of the image of a barnyard animal will be permitted is, again, unclear.

In light of a number of similar, less extreme, recent bills being overturned for violation of the first amendment, it seems unlikely that this one will pass. However, with most people – **games™** included – being all for the introduction of strict age restrictions on games, Mr Kilby's proposal stands out as being regressive in the worst possible way. Forgive us if we pop open a beer or two when the whole stupid mess gets kicked out.



Would you say that this constitutes killing, maiming or dismembering?

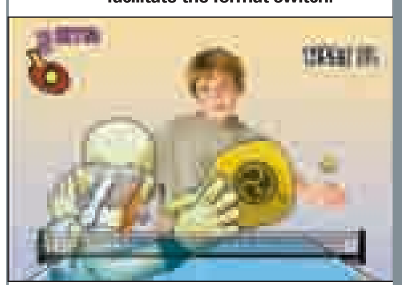
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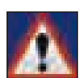
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



PSP PERIPHERALS

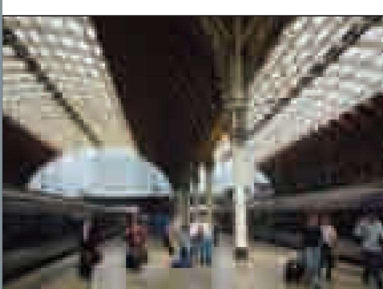
Next to the relentless fun of the Nintendo DS, PSP owners may have been starting to get a case of the green-eyed monster. Fear not, however, for Sony has a raft of add-ons poised for release. Chief among them is an EyeToy camera, with *EyeToy Play* and a video chat system to follow in September. Along with this is a GPS system and a digital distribution service that will allow you to download and play PSOne titles on your PSP. It is not known which titles will be included, but some re-coding is to be expected to facilitate the format switch.





POSTER PALAVER

Sony was forced to end a marketing campaign that featured in train stations up and down the country. Posters were placed on platforms, urging customers to "Take a running jump", a suggestion that rail workers felt was most unhelpful. "The message completely goes against all of our safety messages," said one disgruntled worker. "Particularly because PlayStation is aimed at youngsters, and we are constantly telling them not to trespass." Sony has decided to remove the posters from all inappropriate sites.



READY AT DAWN BOSS SAYS PSP DEVELOPERS MUST UP THEIR GAME

NO EXCUSES

It's been a point of contention for some time now; the amount of PSP titles that pale in comparison to their home console brethren is considerable and largely unacceptable. It has become dull talking about poorly mapped controls and a lack of a second analogue stick, and Ready At Dawn boss Didier Malenfant is inclined to agree. The new studio responsible for the recent *Daxter* spin off, is dedicated to making the most of Sony's handheld, and Malenfant expects other developers to follow suit.

"There's obviously not as many titles as people would want on the platform, but at the same time up until now there hasn't been any title that really gives you the same experience you could find on the PS2. Everything is compromised," he says, "and it bugs the hell out of me when you hear a lot of developers saying 'well, we can't do this that way because it's a handheld game,' or 'we can't do this because it doesn't have a second analogue stick'. Those are all excuses." He is, of course, correct – games such as *WipEout Pure, Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* and *Daxter* itself have proved that, with a little time and effort, the PSP can deliver gaming experiences to match that of home consoles.

"I tend to play my PSP a lot more than any other console simply because it's portable. I don't want to end up playing sub-par games just because I'm on a handheld, which up to [the arrival of the PSP] has been what we've had to do." Malenfant continues, "we really set out to prove that you can do a game that is as good as, if not better than, a PS2 game and really show off the platform. If we do end up becoming the game that opens the floodgates, I'd be really, really proud, because it's such an awesome handheld."

While *Daxter* may not exactly be the game to change the PSP development landscape, it certainly doesn't contradict Malenfant's ethos. games™ certainly believes that these ideas need to be taken heed of and implemented into future PSP development if the platform is to truly prosper. We've totally had enough of struggling through the likes of *Splinter Cell Essentials* and *Ape Escape* for one lifetime; the machine is much too strong and has far too much potential to be compromised with second-rate software. So there.

> "UP UNTIL NOW THERE HASN'T BEEN ANY TITLE THAT REALLY GIVES YOU THE SAME EXPERIENCE YOU COULD FIND ON THE PLAYSTATION2"



The offending item itself – the PSP's sole analogue stick has caused trouble for many developers.

Sam fisher's portable outing is far harder to control than it should be.



ONLINE, IN-STORE

NINTENDO STRENGTHENS RETAIL PRESENCE WITH WI-FI HOTSPOTS

In addition to the 7,500 DS Wi-Fi hotspots that Nintendo has already set up in the UK in partnership with BT Openzone and other such ISPs, the firm announced this month that it would be placing 600-odd Wi-Fi hotspots in retail outlets such as GAME, Gamestation, HMV and Toys 'R' Us.

Of those 600, most of them will also function as download stations, enabling users to gain access to demos of forthcoming titles. Already in place are *Polarium* and *Meteos*, while *Pokémon Trozei!* (or *Pokémon Link* as it will be known over here), *Trauma Center: Under The Knife* and *Prof. Kawashima's Brain Training* downloads will follow in the coming few months.

Interestingly, Nintendo has also promised additional content for *Animal Crossing DS*, although we don't yet know what form such additional content will take. Users can also download Shigeru Miyamoto's Nintendog (whose name is Pip) and a trailer for *Metroid Prime: Hunters*.

We're intrigued at the possibilities afforded by such download play – although Sony has rolled out download stations across Japan, no plans for a similar service in Europe have been announced. We've been getting demo discs for our PCs and consoles for years, but such an accessible, hassle-free download service is ideal for showcasing new games to consumers (rather than putting them into a display DS and watching the machine get raped by chavs with lighters and kids with over-zealous stylus jabs).

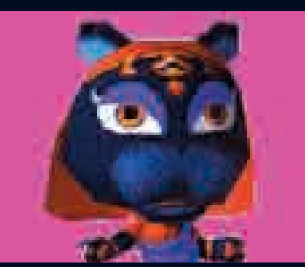
Nintendo's Wi-Fi service is proving increasingly popular following the release of *Metroid Prime: Hunters* over in the US, and it is, of course, always encouraging to see Nintendo catering to the specific needs of its European audience. We're still so unused to the sight…



We wish we were cool like these people.

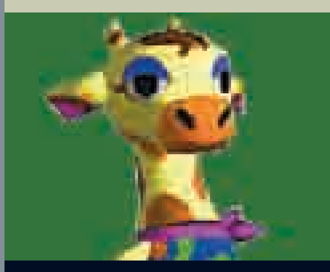


MOST-HATED ANIMAL CROSSING VISITORS



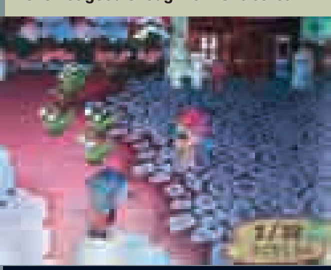
No.5 KATRINA

What are you good for, exactly?



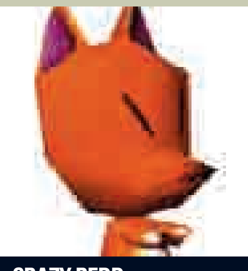
No.4 GRACIE

We're not good enough for her clothes.



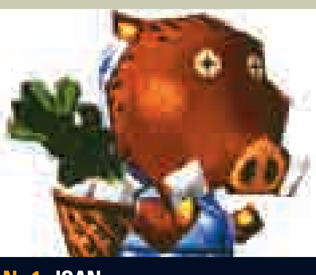
No.3 LYLE

We could only get this rubbish picture.



No.2 CRAZY REDD

Sell us fake paintings, will you? You'll pay.



No.1 JOAN

Look how ugly she is. She won't go away.

GAMES ROOM 101



THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 43: STUPID MERCHANDISE

We can't remember whether we've complained about this before, but game merchandising has reached new levels of idiocy recently (Mario's 20th anniversary didn't help). We're addicted to tat, and can't fathom why anyone would buy some of the nonsense we've seen on eBay, and this is from the magazine team who dominates the majority of its office space with assorted *Street Fighter*, *Monkey Ball*, *Final Fantasy* and *Pokémon*-themed bits of plastic.

Case in point: the new *Final Fantasy XII* 'potion', which comes both in plastic bottles and, even more offensive, expensive glass ones for which you pay six times as much. It's Red Bull, but tastes even worse. However, because it has *Final Fantasy* plastered all over it – and some come with collectable cards – everyone's buying it. This goes beyond tat – we're convinced that drinking large quantities of this evil liquid could have severe health implications.

Couple this with 'new' Nintendo remote-controlled *Mario Kart DS* cars that we swear we've seen before in 1992 (and in 1997) with only minor packaging differences, and you can see why we're baffled. We've wasted so much money on useless tat over the years that resentment was bound to surface eventually.



Just look at all this silliness.



Expensive, evil liquid in a *Final Fantasy* bottle. Oh dear, oh dear.



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GOD OF WAR

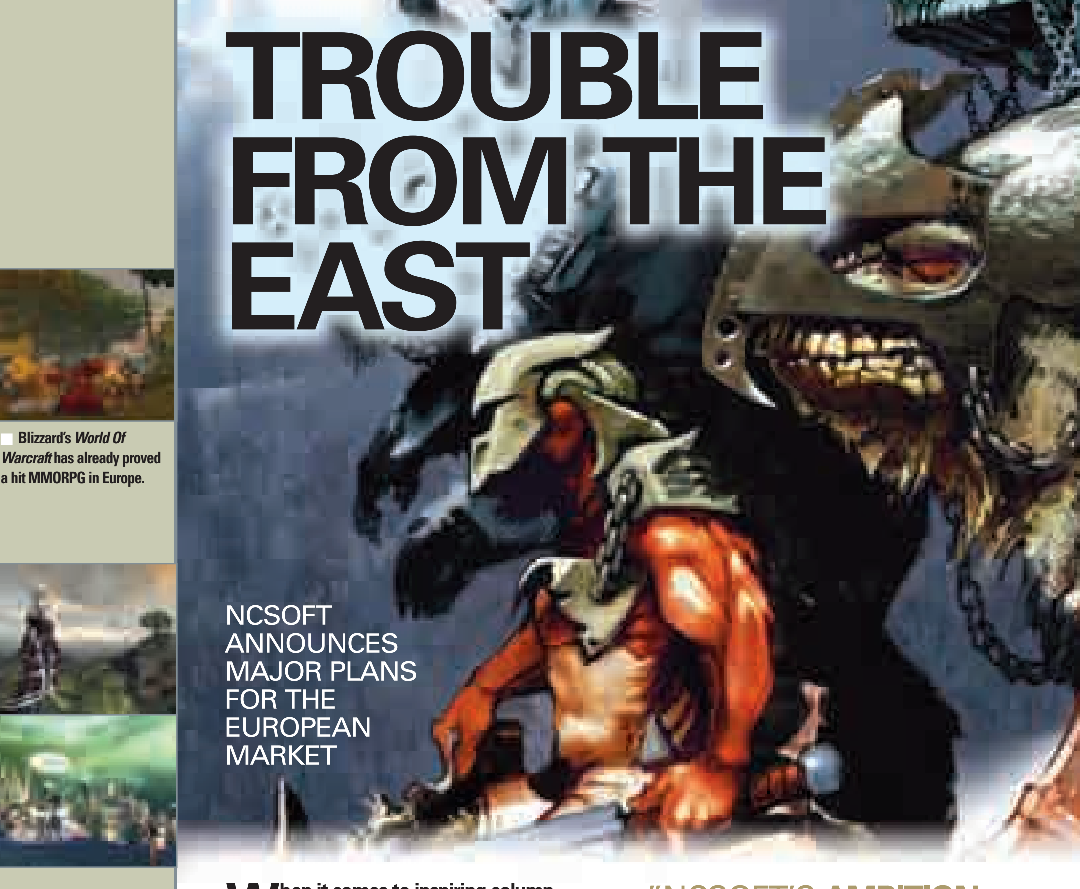
Putting an end to recent speculation, Sony has announced that David Jaffe is currently working on a sequel to the enormously popular *God Of War*. The game will receive a simultaneous worldwide release in the first quarter of 2007, so European fans won't have to wait months to get their hands on a copy. "I always said that *God Of War* was my dream game," says Jaffe, "well no longer, *God Of War II* really is the game I've always wanted to play." Let's hope he has something more intelligent to say for *God Of War III*.



PISS TAKE

If Marcel Neundorfer never accomplishes another thing, he will already have done enough. He is the mastermind behind *On Target*, a new, urinal-based videogame that awards points when players shoot targets on a pressure-sensitive screen with their urine. Whether this product ever reaches the common market is in doubt, but we can only urge the owners of every pub and club in the country to seriously consider it. Toilet queues would no doubt grow, as would over-zealous users getting piss all over their nice clean trousers.

Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft* has already proved a hit MMORPG in Europe.



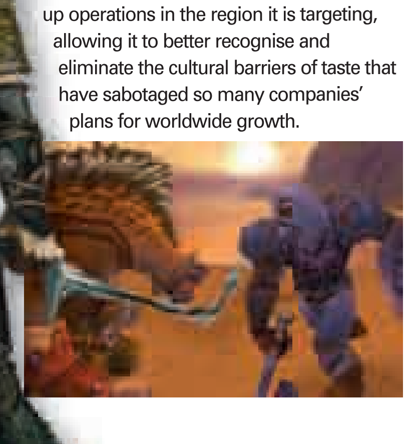
TROUBLE FROM THE EAST

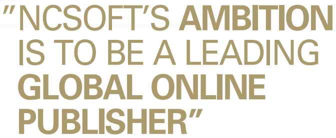
NCSOFT ANNOUNCES MAJOR PLANS FOR THE EUROPEAN MARKET

When it comes to inspiring column inches, not much can hold a candle to the rise and rise of MMORPGs. To say that a product pushes back the boundaries of gaming is something of a cliché, but with MMORPGs it's unquestionably true – they're broadening our idea of what a game can be.

With annual subscriptions for online games totalling in the region of $2 billion per year, their financial success has been astonishing, but Europe has proved the most difficult nut for the market to crack. Till now.

NCsoft, the leading purveyor of MMORPG titles like *Guild Wars*, has announced plans to broaden its portfolio and work with European studios. Already a huge presence in Asia – the company is based in Korea – and the US, NCsoft tends to expand by setting up operations in the region it is targeting, allowing it to better recognise and eliminate the cultural barriers of taste that have sabotaged so many companies' plans for worldwide growth.




"NCSOFT'S **AMBITION** IS TO BE A LEADING **GLOBAL ONLINE PUBLISHER"**

"NCsoft's ambition is to be a leading global online publisher, and we have achieved much of that ambition already," says Thomas Bidaux, NCsoft Europe's director of products. "The next natural step for us is to have development driven from all regions of the world. We're aware of cultural differences, not only between east and west, but between North America and Europe, and we want to get the best of each."

Further details are expected at E3, but the success of Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft* in the European market – subscriptions have just passed the million mark – suggests a high demand beyond what *Guild Wars* and *City Of Heroes* have already achieved in this region. NCsoft's aim to produce titles tailored to its target audience places it well to expand upon the success of its previous games.

This is the latest in the online onslaught from Korea. Online and traditional games can co-exist, but MMORPG users are less likely to buy games in the volumes they did, and with firms like NCsoft building an international network of studios, and the arrival of MMORPGs on console, publishers may have to rethink their strategies.


eMag

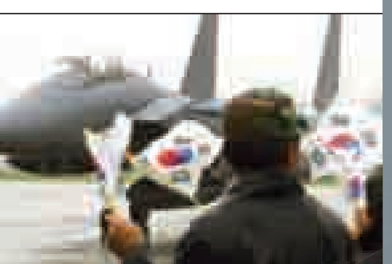
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WAR GAMES

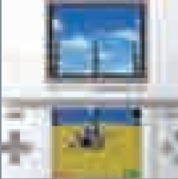
The South Korean air force is recruiting professional gamers to help develop its next wave of flight-training simulators and war-game programs. The gamers – just five of the 300 resident in South Korea – will have the time deducted from the country's mandatory two-year national service, and will have to do a month's boot-camp beforehand. The recruits will be allowed to participate in competitions, but will be denied any prize money. Their girlfriends would be very upset… if any of them had one.



OLD ENEMIES

In the dark recesses of videogames' past there was a time where only two names mattered – Sega and Nintendo. You could be one or the other, never both: NES or Master System, SNES or Mega Drive, Mario or Sonic, it was the ultimate rivalry. Those days are gone, and now Sega has announced that it will be making classic Mega Drive titles available for the 'Virtual Console' system on Nintendo's Revolution. The game selection will be a 'best of' from Sega's extensive back-catalogue, and provides yet another string for the Revolution's ever more impressive bow.





A new *Zelda* game for the DS is due later this year.

ZELDA: THE NEXT GENERATION

NEW ZELDA DS TITLE ANNOUNCED AS MIYAMOTO REVEALS REVOLUTION COMPATIBILITY FOR TWILIGHT PRINCESS

At GDC this month, Nintendo announced a new *Wind Waker*-styled *Legend Of Zelda* title for the DS just weeks after Shigeru Miyamoto revealed Revolution compatibility and extra features for the forthcoming GameCube title *Twilight Princess*.

"One of the most important features is that because Revolution can run GameCube software, when you play *Twilight Princess* on Revolution you can take advantage of the Revolution controller," said Miyamoto in an interview that appeared on Nintendo Europe's VIP site.

It is likely that the extra features will be revealed in full at E3 when the Revolution itself is to be exposed in its complete form. Although it's already widely known that the Revolution will be able to play software from all of Nintendo's history, including GameCube games, this is the first mention of special added features for a game that Nintendo has made. Coupled with the fact that *Twilight Princess* and the Revolution's release dates are expected to coincide, it seems increasingly likely that *Twilight Princess* will double up as a launch incentive for the new console.

The new DS *Zelda* title will be called *The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* and at the moment is tentatively pencilled in for release later this year. Stylistically, the game is consistent with *Wind Waker*, although the video shown at GDC suggests that the gameplay will share elements from both *Wind Waker* and *Four Swords*. We've seen a mix of full 3D and 2D gameplay incorporating various stylus actions, such as annotating maps, directing boomerangs and drawing routes over the sea. It is thought that the game takes place directly after *Wind Waker*, although nothing of the game's story or premise is known for certain yet. No characters other than Link were shown in the trailer and the environments and abilities showcased gave very little away about the game (although they have got us very excited nonetheless).

games™ will bring you further details on both *Twilight Princess* and *Phantom Hourglass* after E3 where both games are expected to be shown in full. Look forward to comprehensive, in-depth GDC coverage and analysis next issue.


eMag

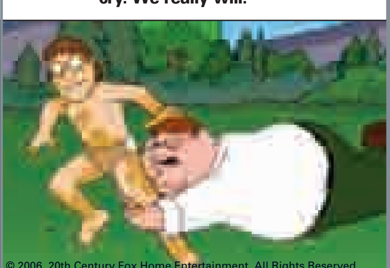
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



IN THE FAMILY

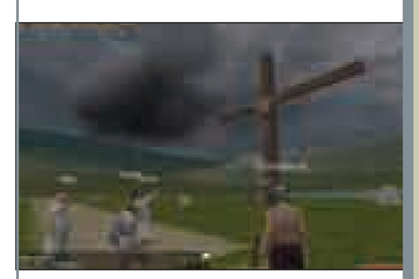
Remember how, when Vivendi lost the *Simpsons* licence to EA a few months ago, we said that we hoped nobody ever acquired the *Family Guy* licence to make a videogame? Remember how we said it would break us? Well, it appears that we were tempting fate. THQ has a next-generation *Family Guy* game in production, in which the characters will 'wreak havoc' upon Rhode Island in a 'hilarious action-adventure'. We're not prone to judging things prematurely, but if this turns out to be rubbish we will cry. We really will.





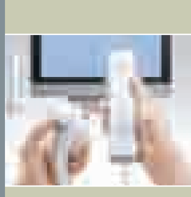
CRUCIFIXION? GOOD

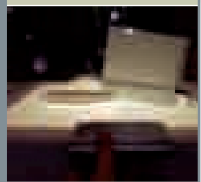
"Line on the left, one cross each." Outside *The Life Of Brian*, crucifixion is rightly seen as an atrocity, is not funny in any way and has not been practiced for centuries. Not so in the virtual world. MMO's often have methods for punishing troublesome players, but Roma Victor has sunk the practice to new depths by nailing one user to a cross for a week. Supposedly the public nature of the punishment will dissuade others from committing similar crimes, though some feel the simulation was in tremendously bad taste and constitutes a crime in itself.





Metroid Prime: Hunters is a stroke of genius for the DS.





A snap of the Revolution display at GDC, taken by RevolutionReport.com.

IWATA SKIRTS THE ISSUE AT GDC

SATORU'S SILENCE

In a GDC keynote speech that many expected to be crammed with information on the Revolution, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, perhaps predictably, left everyone wanting more. Speaking in cryptic terms, Iwata spoke of how Nintendo was "disrupting development" in a number of ways and stated that all would become aware of their plans to, "disrupt console gaming in a few weeks." While this seems to indicate a more detailed announcement at E3, it made the lack of information at the press conference all the more frustrating.

Iwata went into some detail on the new *Zelda DS* game and *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, before speaking about the ideas behind the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection, but it all had the hollow ring of old news. Summing up, Iwata stated, "When I imagine what faces us right now, I think of explorers setting foot on a new continent. For them, it was impossible to imagine what adventure lay ahead." An intriguing allegory to be sure, but after labouring on the way Nintendo has 'disrupted' Wi-Fi and handheld gaming, and with the promise of further 'disruption' to come, Iwata did little to disrupt the sense of disappointment in San Jose.

> "I THINK OF EXPLORERS SETTING FOOT ON A NEW CONTINENT"

LIVE OPEN

MICROSOFT OPENS UP XBOX LIVE TO DEVELOPERS

At the GDC this month, Microsoft announced that Xbox Live will be opened up to developers via the firm's new set of development tools, XNA Studio. Designed as middleware to aid developers, and incorporating XNA Framework (a tool for developers working on PC and 360 titles), XNA Studio is expected to prove popular with developers, "Developers need a better way to make games and manage the production process", says Microsoft's Chris Satchell. "XNA Studio enables all developers – from major studios to the two guys moonlighting on a dream project in their garage or dorm room – to create games in new, more efficient ways."

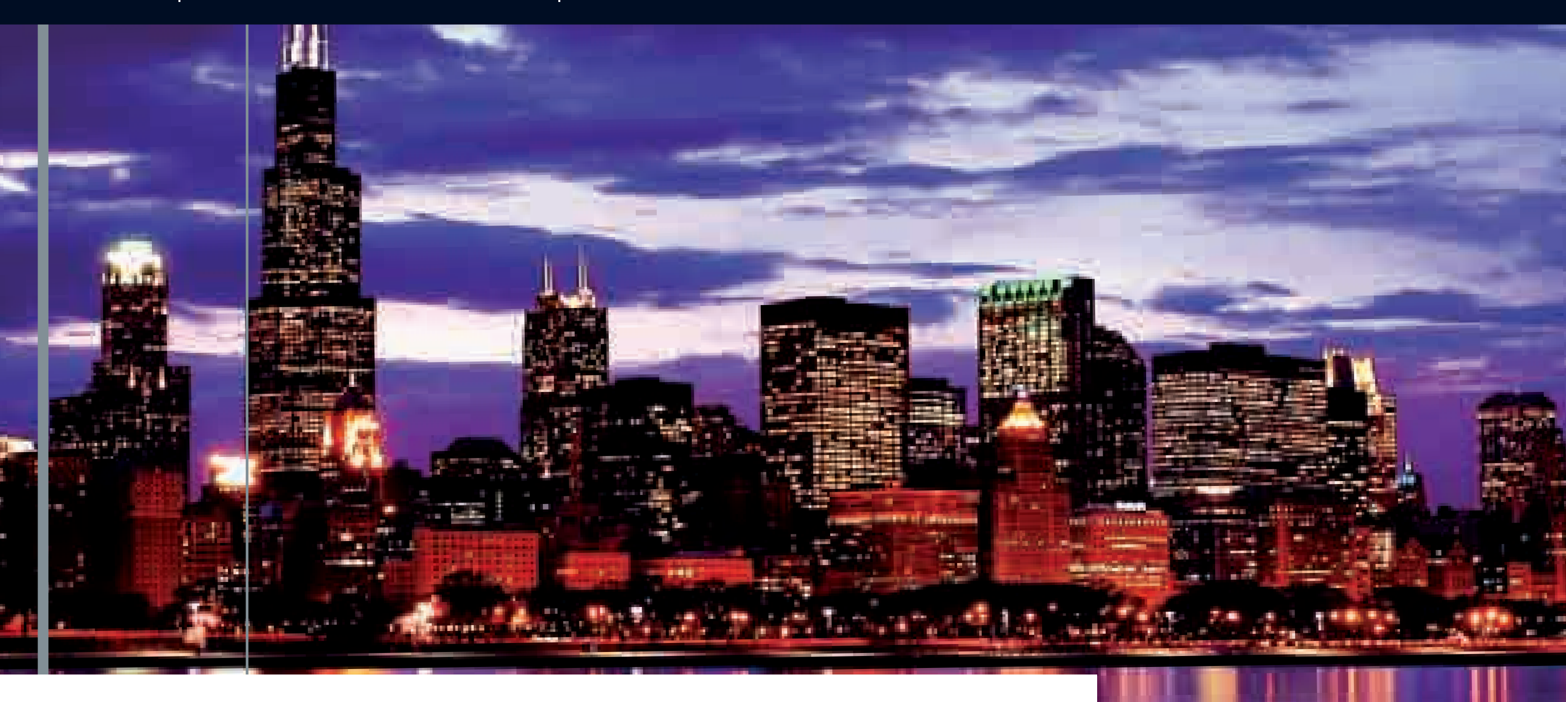


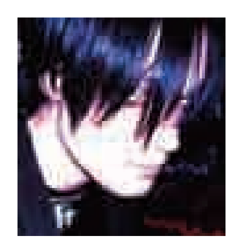
What is he doing with his hands. This Microsoft thing is like a cult.

It's the Xbox Live implications of Microsoft's decision to open the Xbox Live Server Platform up to developers that are most interesting. Developers will be able to sort out their own servers on Live, making life easier for those who wish to develop specific online capability – such as MMOGs. Microsoft hopes that its action will lead to more 'online innovation'. As the tools are not set for release until May, however, we may not see the fruits of such innovation for a while yet.




eMag





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

"MYSELF AND MY TRANSLATOR ARRIVED IN AN EXHAUSTED MAN IN A PINK SHIRT,

Sometimes things just don't go how you'd planned. I set up an interview with Tetsuya Mizuguchi, creator of *Rez* and *Lumines*, and the mastermind behind the original *Sega Rally*. The meeting, which took some arranging, was held at a swanky hotel in San Francisco. Myself and my translator arrived at Mizuguchi's room to find an exhausted man in a pink shirt, with a sardonic grin. We sat down, and found him to be one of the more honest people in the Japanese industry, with extensive thoughts on emotion in games, the falseness of reality in a virtual world and a host of other topics, in an hour-long interview. Bit of a pity, then, to discover that the voice recorder was hungry for tape, and ate the entire conversation.

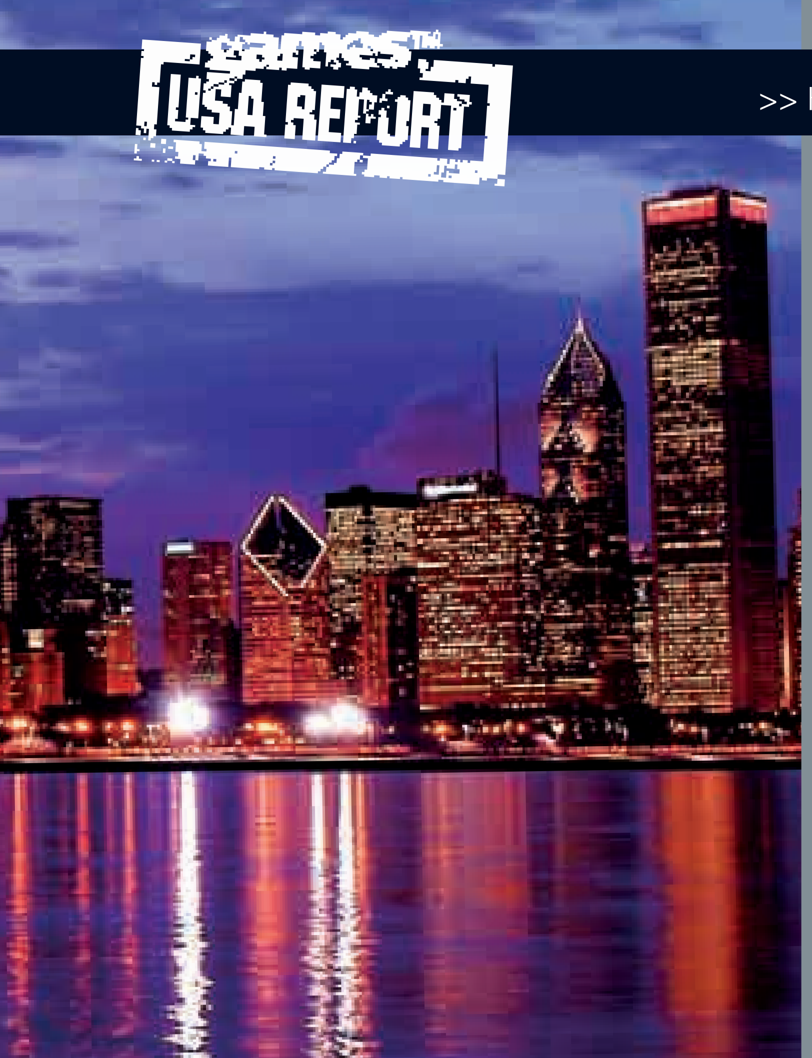
It's devastating when you've promised someone the cover of your magazine (no, not this one). I wanted to salvage some of it, so I sent him some 'follow-up' questions for clarity. I hoped I could cobble together what I had left of the tape with what I got in the email. But it wasn't the same. The clever, honest man had been coated with a businesslike veneer, and the feature simply wasn't long enough to run. Though when you've an 800-word column to write, you start to think: hey, maybe I can, after all! Bit of a deviation for Letter From America, but it happened in America, so it counts. Balls to you who think otherwise. So on with it…

BS: How did you get into the games industry?

TM: When I was a child, I never expected that I would design games one day. I actually wanted to become a journalist. I entered art university and majored in literature and media aesthetics. Then, just before graduation, I decided to go into the videogame industry. The first videogame I played was Atari's *Pong*. When I was ten years old, I came across the game when I went to my friend's house to hang out. I still remember the shock I received from my first encounter with videogames.

BS: How important is realism versus emotion in games?

TM: To be real and emotional – those are both very important factors for me. However, to express them you have to wait for the advancement of technology. The evolution of hardware made more realistic expression and better music experiences possible. And from now on, the evolution is moving from hardware to software (programming). It will not be long before both of them integrate, and everything balances out.



MIZUGUCHI'S ROOM TO FIND WITH A SARDONIC GRIN"

BS: What brought you to this turning point, away from realism and towards more innovative gameplay?

TM: I don't think I've done anything in the way of completely new and innovative gameplay. It might appear fresh by the combination of various factors. Maybe it's that the evolution of technology has begun to satisfy human desires and instincts that were previously dormant. I think there's also an especially large potential for the Internet to change gameplay. As far as realism is concerned, it's more important for me to create 'illusion' rather than 'reality'.

BS: What's your current view of the Japanese game industry?

TM: While the speed of technology and gameplay evolution is increasing, the speed of big corporations' movement is apparently slowing down. I've seen many individuals who are frustrated with this situation, and as a result they became independent themselves. It's a big turning point. The time has come when the hardware ceases to become a limitation, the innovation of the polygon gives way to the innovation of the texture, and the network becomes a standard; there is no way you can be successful with the conventional method of the past. The relation between publishing and creation will continue to change dramatically.

So there you have it – how to take a ruined interview and put it to some use. As I said, not a conventional column, but I think we've all learnt something here today. I think…

Many thanks



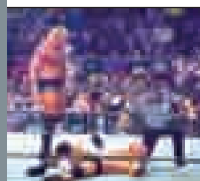
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Soccer (aka football)



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

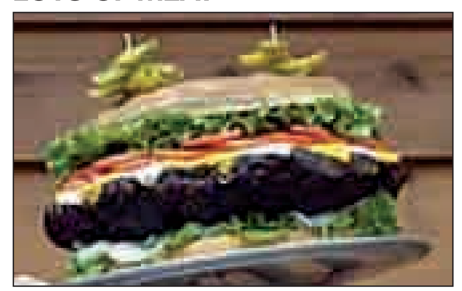
Wrestling



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

LOTS OF MEAT



I'm not a meat eater, but I just sat down to dinner with a friend who told me he just had the best burger of his life. A quarter pound of fried beef covered with sliced roast beef, lettuce, tomatoes and sauce – basically a Reuben Burger. It's amazing no one thought of it before. Now I'm just waiting for him to drop dead from it.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Fight Night Round 3**	EA Sports	PS2
2	**Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter**	Ubisoft	Xbox
3	**Driver: Parallel Lines**	Atari	PS2
4	**Black**	Electronic Arts	PS2
5	**24: The Game**	Sony	PS2
6	**Black**	Electronic Arts	Xbox
7	**WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW '06**	THQ	PS2
8	**Fight Night Round 3**	EA Sports	Xbox
9	**Ice Age 2: The Meltdown**	Vivendi	PS2
10	**Sonic Riders**	Sega	GC

(Updated 29/03/06)


24: The Game

Black

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THE DS LITE IS MEANT AS A REPLACEMENT FOR EXPECTED THE PREVIOUS UNIT TO

I'm sure you know about the DS Lite. I'm sure you know more about it than I do. Hell, I'm pretty sure you actually have one. Well, good for you. I don't care. I don't care because I don't have one. And I don't have one because I don't want one.

Okay, so I'm lying through my teeth. I really do want one. It's just that I can't get one. As I reported in this column a few months ago, the DS has reached the status of 'full-blown pop culture phenomenon' in this country, and once something reaches that stage in Japan, the country that invented the full-blown pop culture phenomenon (they also 'invented' maths and baseball), it becomes so popular it's invisible. As in, you can't find a DS Lite anywhere in Japan. People want one so they can play their *Brain Training* games on the train on the way to work, or else pet their imaginary puppy on their lunch break.

The public's need for the DS crept up subtly, and six months after *Brain Age* and *Nintendogs* were released, *Mario Kart DS* and *Animal Crossing* emerged and sold a million copies each in under a month. And then there was that *Tamagotchi* game that also sold a million. All Nintendo DS consoles on the market disappeared overnight, though no one remembers the exact night. The big celebrity-endorsed ad campaign ironically didn't pop up till a week or so later. The ad was for the sequel to *Brain Age* which went on to sell 1.5 million copies despite there not being a single DS on the majority of shelves in stores.



Though Nintendo denied rumours about a DS redesign, it was hard at work on the Lite all the time. The boom of the original DS was nothing the company had predicted, which is funny what with all its talk about the Revolution appealing to 'non-gamers'. It's obvious that the DS Lite is meant as a replacement for the DS; Nintendo merely expected the previous unit to last longer.

I've played on a DS Lite, with its gorgeous screen and perfect buttons. It was terrible, as it wasn't mine. It belonged to a guy who offered to sell it to me for just ¥1,000 more than its sticker price. I told him no. He told me, "I stayed up all night in line to buy this". I couldn't comprehend why he would offer to sell it to me for just ¥1,000 more than he'd bought it for, after staying up all night for it. He waited two days, and then sold it to a used electronics shop for nearly twice its price. I went into the store a day later, and they had just one used DS Lite remaining, selling for about £220. It was gone before I left the store.

A week before the DS Lite went on sale, shops were full of gamers selling their old DSs for more than they'd originally paid. Not all of them went on to buy a DS Lite; many bought a used DS prior to the Lite's release. They may live to regret it.

What occurs to me here is that DS units of either design are sadly being used as an investment as much as they are games machines. Remembering Nintendo's battle against used games and game rentals (the latter was outlawed), and its attempts at



THE DS; NINTENDO MERELY LAST LONGER THAN IT DID"

alternative methods of content distribution (with the Famicom, consumers could take blank disks to kiosks in convenience stores, and load the data onto the game), its decision to delay the release of two of the announced three DS Lite colours until a week after the promised launch is looking like a clever move. Now, if only people would stop exporting them on eBay. Can't Nintendo force a law against things like that? Living in Japan used to mean I got games first and could brag about it. Now, thanks to Internet retailers and/or hardcore consumers willing to stay up all night, I'm last in line.

Well, I mean, I have a red DS already. I guess I don't need a Lite. Maybe when that *New Super Mario Bros.* comes out. Oh, hell. *New Super Mario Bros.* is being released in the west three weeks ahead of Japan? They're taking away my only joy here. Oh well.

Kind regards

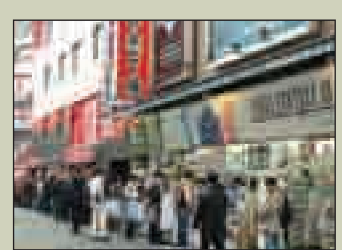


TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 43: SINGING A JAPANESE ROCK AND ROLL SONG

"Tsu-ki-a-i-ta-i" by The RC Succession (key vocabulary: Tsukiaitai = I wanna be with you. Tsukiaitakunai = I don't wanna be with you)

Moshi mo oira ga eraku natta Erakunai yatsu to wa tsukiaitakunai	If I were to become a great man, I wouldn't dare hang around un-great men
Tatoe soitsu ga furui tomodachi demo Erakunai yatsu to wa tsukiaitakunai	Even should he be a great old friend, I wouldn't dare hang around un-great men
Oira ga mukashi sewa ni natta yatsu demo Ikura ii yatsu demo tsukiaitakunai	Even though he might have saved my very life in the past – I don't care how nice he is. Away with him!
Dakedo soitsu ga are wo mottetaraOre wa sabetsu shinai – uuu, tsukiaitai!!	Yet, should he possess . . . "it", I will not hesitate. We shall rock!!



OVER ON THE SOFTWARE FRONT

Perhaps you've heard the legend of how they distribute software over here. It's beautiful. If you want *Final Fantasy XII*, all you have to do is go to any convenience store. Every 7-Eleven in Japan, for example, had a banner flying out front advertising the game's 16 March release date. If I didn't work in a place where I get videogames for free (shh), I could have walked to the 7-Eleven a block from my apartment, said, "Hey, I want that *Final Fantasy XII*", and then given them a little money to know I was serious. This gives the publisher an idea of how many people want the game, and how many others will buy it as well. This makes the process of game distribution much smoother and cheaper, and helps to eliminate the possibility of 800 guys waiting in the cold until the morning the game goes on sale to ensure they get a copy.

Though, uh… it seems people lined up for *Final Fantasy XII* anyway. And its cover price is ¥8,990 – about £47. (The typical Japanese game is ¥5,000.) And oh yes, the game is lovely, and no, I will not be selling my copy on eBay.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Final Fantasy XII	Square-Enix	PS2
2	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
3	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
4	English Training	Nintendo	DS
5	Brain Training	Nintendo	PS2
6	Samurai Warriors 2	Koei	PS2
7	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	DS
8	Seiken Densetsu: Children Of Mana	Square Enix	DS
9	Guitar Freaks V & Drum Mania V	Konami	PS2
10	Kero Kero 7	Bandai	DS

(Updated week ending 19/03/06)


Final Fantasy XII
Animal Crossing: Wild World



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

DEDICTED FOLLOWER OF VIDEOGAMES



And so, *God Of War II* has just been announced and everyone's very excited. The presentation lit up GDC, the game looks phenomenal, and following the original's success, both critically and at retail, it's highly likely that *God Of War II* will have a fair bit more cash behind it, too. It won't be with us until 2007, giving Jaffe and his team as much time as they need to perfect it. Impressive as the game looks, though, this isn't next-generation hardware we're looking at – *God Of War II* is coming out on the PS2, not the PS3.

It's easy to forget, in this mad next-gen rush where developers and consumers alike are fixated on the new, that old hardware is actually a much safer, cheaper and generally better option for most developers. For one thing, the development costs drop dramatically as soon as new technology comes on the market.

It's also highly likely that the studio will have been working with said hardware over the last few years, so there's no struggle to learn the ins and outs of a new machine when all you want to do is make a game. Most importantly, older consoles have a much bigger installed user base – in the case of the PlayStation2 especially. Why sell to one million people when you can sell to ten million?

People would do well to remember this enormous discrepancy in audience between current and next-generation consoles. *God Of War II* is the first genuinely exciting new console project for a non next-gen (I refuse to call them 'last generation', not just yet) console that I've seen in a long time.

Perhaps at E3 we'll be offered a range of tantalising projects using older hardware… but it's likely we'll just see more people wasting development time and resources selling expensive games to a tiny audience.

Mr X hates sheep. He's scared of their feet.

FROM THE FRONT

BUNGIE AND VALVE ALL-STARS FORM STUDIO / PROSPERITY IN A TIME OF CRISIS / LOTR HITS EUROPE

NEW DEVELOPER PROMISES GREATNESS

GIANT ALLIANCE

The names Hamilton Chu, Michael Evans, Andy Glaister and Steve Theodore are unlikely to be recognised by many gamers but, for one reason or another, these men are responsible for some of the most important and influential titles of the last 20 years. Now, the foursome has opened the doors of its very own Seattle-based development studio, Giant Bite Games.

Chu and Evans worked on *Halo* and *Halo 2* during their time employed at Bungie, while Theodore was an employee of Valve and worked on both *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*. Glaister held the position of director of development at Microsoft Games Studios before moving on to Zipper Interactive as technical art manager. We're not entirely sure what that means exactly but, with credentials as impressive as these, Giant Bite Games could well become the gaming equivalent of a rock 'n' roll supergroup. Think Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, but without the facial hair, coke or parties.

"We're proud of our work at Bungie, Microsoft and Zipper," commented Evans, in the year's most obvious statement. "It was amazing to work with such fantastic teams on games that turned out so successfully."

The firm is still very much in its infancy, and details of the first project are under discussion, but Glaister is optimistic that the new studios could develop into something very special indeed. "Giant Bite will keep the traditions of world-class production values and cohesive gameplay," he claims. "We see a great opportunity to build the sort of company that we always wanted to work for."



Giant Bite Games features 'tasty' talent from the makers of *Counter-Strike* and *Half-Life*.

SUPER STUDIO

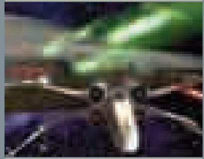
BIOWARE/PANDEMIC REAPS HUGE REWARDS

Many commentators observe today as a difficult time for the games industry, but no one seems to have told BioWare/Pandemic Studios. Formed in November in a $300 million deal, the super-studio has has just posted gross profits of $800 million. Collectively, the companies have sold 28 million copies of their various titles, including Pandemic's *Mercenaries,* and BioWare's *Jade Empire* that won the Interactive Achievement Award for RPG Of The Year.

"The advent of next-generation platforms opens up new vistas for us to experiment with," stated Ray Muzyka, joint CEO of BioWare Corp. "By pushing the limits of these new worlds and building 'event' products, and by focusing on creating the best place for team-orientated talent, we will continue to drive innovation and deliver top-quality games."



The BioWare/Pandemic super-studio has a worldwide employee base of 500.



Star Wars: Battlefront II and *Destroy All Humans!* are among the studio's top earners.





FANTASY FUN

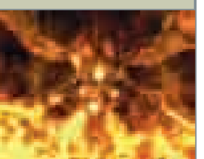
CODEMASTERS EXTENDS ALLIANCE WITH TURBINE

Fanboys of Middle Earth, lend me your ears. It's time to get excited, for Codemasters Online Gaming has announced that it will be extending its relationship with developer Turbine Inc. to cover European territories.

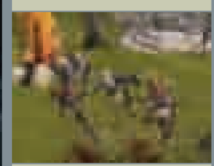
The two initially formed an alliance to allow Codemasters Online to be service provider for *Dungeons And Dragons Online: Stormreach*, and Turbine is increasingly delighted with the partnership. Jeffrey Anderson, president of Turbine, commented, "Through the last year we have established a close working relationship with Codemasters, and have been impressed with its commitment and expertise in the online gaming space".

The upshot of all this communal backslapping is that the massively multi-player *Lord Of The Rings Online* game will be made available in Europe for the first time delighting Tolkien fans across the continent and giving people who really don't need any more reasons to stay in good cause to shut the curtains and prepare for a long summer of web-fuelled darkness.

Codemasters CEO Rod Cousens is predictably full of praise for the epic. "*LOTR* is one of the most suited pieces of fantasy to translate into a rich and rewarding MMORPG experience," he claimed. We bet folding money that he hasn't even read it.



That's one angry little beastie. He obviously hasn't heard the good news yet.



But where are all the shtupid, fatt hobbitshes?

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion**	2K Games	Multi
2	**The Godfather**	Electronic Arts	Multi
3	**Buzz: The BIG Quiz!**	Sony	PS2
4	**FIFA Street 2**	EA Games	Multi
5	**Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter**	Ubisoft	Multi
6	**Fight Night Round 3**	EA Sports	Multi
7	**Driver: Parallel Lines**	Atari	Multi
8	**24: The Game**	Sony	PS2
9	**Black**	Electronic Arts	Multi
10	**The Sims 2: Open For Business**	Electronic Arts	PC

It comes as no surprise to us that the superb *Oblivion* is topping the charts this month. After all the hours we've put in, we're pretty will be plenty of happy buyers out there. The rest of the chart doesn't look too shabby either. Good work everyone.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 25 March 2006)



The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion

The Godfather

Black

RELEASE LISTS



Yakuza: PS2
Shenmue with Japanese organised crime is a mightily interesting concept.

Electroplankton: DS
Is it a game? Or is it a tracing paper-thin music toy? You decide.



Unreal Tournament 2007: PC
Unreal Engine 3 shows its muscle in this latest slice of shooting mayhem.

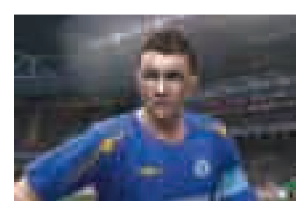


gamesTM MOST PLAYED

PRO EVO SOCCER 5

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

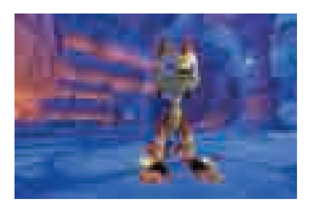
After a brief but fulfilling flirtation with *Fight Night*, the *Evo* has returned to our screens. A new office means new challengers, and we are tackling the competition with renewed grit and determination. Expansive play has been taken to new levels, and the other magazines are quaking in their boots.



DAXTER

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony

Nobody expected anything from *Daxter* the notoriously irritating rodent, but here we have been treated to an impeccably designed 3D platformer with beautiful visuals awash with character and charm. The script is actually reminiscent of a Pixar movie. Stellar stuff.



GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Ubisoft

Single-player is a thing of beauty, but nothing prepared us for *Recon*'s online majesty. A few connection issues aside, the sheer volume of modes, options and possibilities means we'll be keeping it Clancy for months to come. 16-player online co-op? Don't mind if we do…





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '06			
21 April	SOCOM 3 US Navy SEALs	Sony	
28 April	Evolution GT	Konami	
28 April	Stunt Car Crash	Midas	
28 April	World Championship Poker 2	Crave	
28 April	WWII: Tank Battles	Midas	
TBC	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	Dragon Quest: The Journey Of The Cursed King	SquareEnix	
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood	
MAY '06			
05 May	Pac-Man World 3	Electronic Arts	
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
TBC	Urban Chaos: Riot Response	Eidos	
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Scarface	VU Games	
TBC	Tourist Trophy	Sony	
JUNE '06			
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	Wanted
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	Wanted
Q2 '06			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	WWII Air Supremacy	Midas	
TBC	And1 Streetball	Ubisoft	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Yakuza	Sega	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Mortal Kombat Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	D1rt	Koch Media	
TBC	Crimson Tears	Capcom	
TBC	Forbidden Siren 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
26 May	Chibi-Robo!	Nintendo	
JUNE '06			
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
TBC '06			
TBC	Chaos Field	03 Entertainment	
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	Rising Star	Wanted
TBC	Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft	



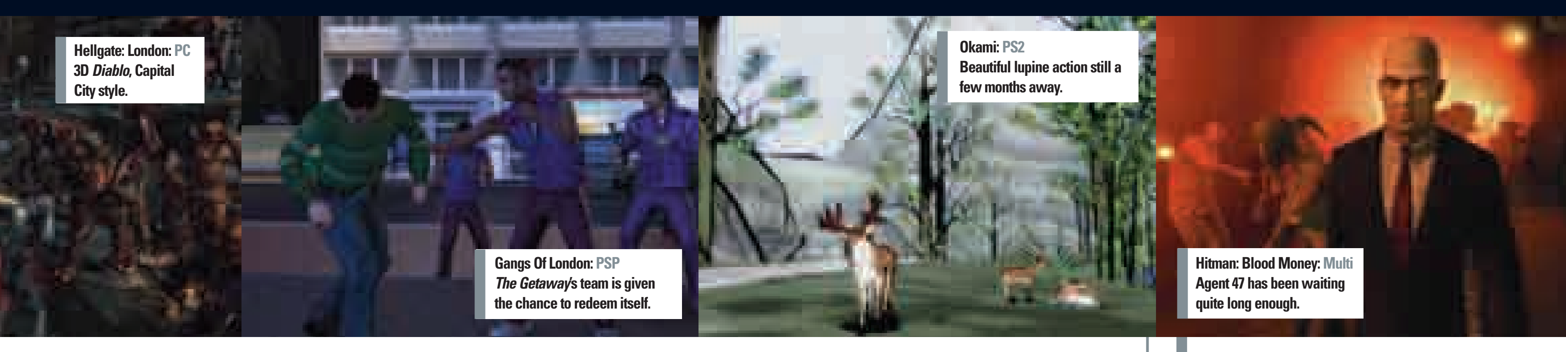
XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '06			
21 April	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	Wanted
28 April	World Championship Poker 2	Crave	
MAY '06			
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
TBC	Urban Chaos: Riot Response	Eidos	
JUNE '06			
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Scarface	VU Games	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC '06			
TBC	Sensible Soccer	Kuju	
TBC	StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard	
TBC	Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Mortal Kombat Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood	

XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '06			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
MAY '06			
26 May	MotoGP '06	THQ	
JUNE '06			
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	Wanted
Q2 '06			
TBC	Chromehounds	Sega	
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	
TBC	Prey	2K Games	
TBC	Saint's Row	THQ	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Hellgate: London: PC
3D *Diablo*, Capital City style.

Gangs Of London: PSP
The Getaway's team is given the chance to redeem itself.

Okami: PS2
Beautiful lupine action still a few months away.

Hitman: Blood Money: Multi
Agent 47 has been waiting quite long enough.

Month	Title	Publisher	
TBC '06			
TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega	
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft	
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	
TBC	Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway	Wanted
TBC	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft	
TBC	Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Ninety Nine Nights	Microsoft	
TBC	Frame City Killer	Namco	
TBC	Huxley	Webzen	
TBC	BioShock	2K Games	
TBC	Possessed	Namco	
TBC	Stranglehold	Midway	
TBC	The Darkness	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	Alone In The Dark	Atari	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '06			
21 April	Rogue Trooper	Eidos	
21 April	SpellForce II	JoWood	
28 April	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
28 April	LMA Manager 2006	Codemasters	
28 April	Faces Of War	Ubisoft	
28 April	Guild Wars Factions	NCSoft	Wanted
28 April	War On Terror	MonteCristo	
MAY '06			
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
19 May	Heroes Of Might And Magic V	Ubisoft	Wanted
26 May	Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway	
26 May	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
JUNE '06			
08 June	Prey	2K Games	
09 June	Heart Of Empire: Rome	Deep Silver	
28 June	Rise And Fall	Midway	
JULY '06			
TBC	WOW: The Burning Crusade	Blizzard	
Q2 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC '06			
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ	
TBC	Hellgate: London	Namco	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	
TBC	Spore	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Tabula Rasa	NCSoft	
TBC	Company Of Heroes	THQ	
TBC	Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Activision	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
31 March	Tales Of Phantasia	Namco	
APRIL '06			
07 April	Top Spin 2	2K Games	Wanted
28 April	FIFA World Cup '06	Electronic Arts	
MAY '06			
26 May	Drill Dozer	Nintendo	Wanted
JUNE '06			
02 June	Final Fantasy IV	Nintendo	
TBC	Wario Ware Twisted	Nintendo	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
05 May	Me & My Katamari	Electronic Arts	Wanted
05 May	Pac-Man World 3	Electronic Arts	
12 May	Monster Hunter Freedom	Capcom	
26 May	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	The Con	Sony	
JUNE '06			
28 June	PoPoLoCrois	Agetec Inc.	
TBC	Infected	Majesco	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
TBC '06			
TBC	Gran Turismo 4: Mobile	Sony	
TBC	Daxter	Sony	
TBC	Talkman	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Dragon Ball Z Shin Budokai	Atari	
TBC	Gangs Of London	Sony	
TBC	NBA Ballers: Rebound	Midway	

NINTENDO DS

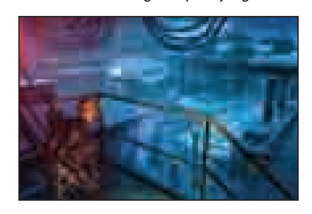
Month	Title	Publisher	
APRIL '06			
21 April	Electroplankton	Nintendo	
28 April	Tamagotchi Connexion Corner Shop	Atari	
28 April	Trauma Center: Under the Knife	Nintendo	Wanted
MAY '06			
05 May	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo	Wanted
05 May	Pac-Man World 3	Electronic Arts	
12 May	Prof Kawashima's Brain Training	Nintendo	
26 May	Super Princess Peach	Nintendo	
TBC	Dragon Booster	Konami	
JUNE '06			
TBC	Metroid Pinball	Nintendo	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star	
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami	
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
TBC '06			
TBC	New Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Last Ninja	Play It	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



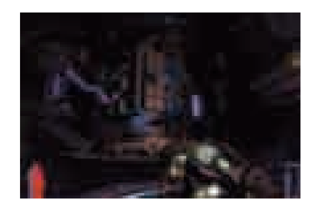
SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Ubisoft
Now delayed until the end of the year, Sam's potentially final outing must provide something to stop an excellent franchise from going stale. The screens look promising: a shaven Fisher in prison attire, but we'll wait for the 360 version before we even begin to pass judgement.



PREY

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: 2K Games
It's all quiet on the *Prey* front, but that doesn't mean that 2K Games' genre-bending shooter has been forgotten. The visuals don't astonish as they did a year ago, but the re-definition of 3D game space certainly does. Only a few months left to wait for this potential masterpiece.



STRANGLEHOLD

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Midway
John Woo is good (well, he was before *MI2*). Chow Yun-Fat is definitely good. Here's hoping that *Stranglehold*, Midway's Woo-'em-up, doesn't spoil this tried and tested formula. Surely, any game where you can run UP a banister while firing off twin pistols has to be brilliant. Surely.

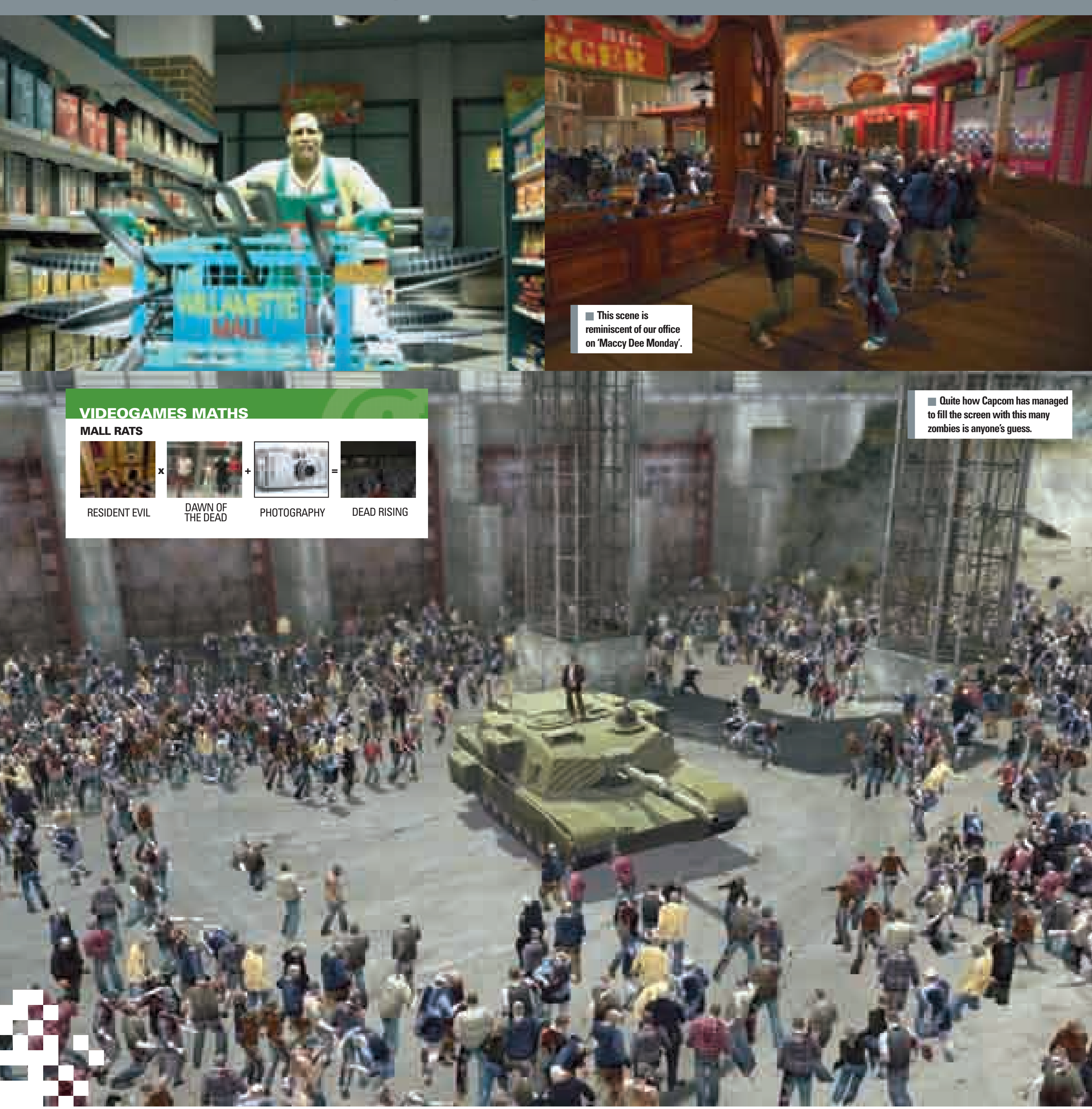




Now, this really sucks. **Kirby's Adventure, Nintendo [NES] 1993**



DEAD RISING



This scene is reminiscent of our office on 'Maccy Dee Monday'.

Quite how Capcom has managed to fill the screen with this many zombies is anyone's guess.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MALL RATS

RESIDENT EVIL × DAWN OF THE DEAD + PHOTOGRAPHY = DEAD RISING



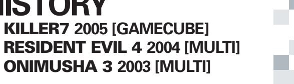


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom is the very definition of a mixed bag. For every bona fide *Resident Evil* or *Onimusha* classic, there's a *Beatdown* or *Without Warning* to balance it out. Still, the company is one of the most prolific, innovative and important software developers in the world, and long may it continue.

HISTORY

- **KILLER7** 2005 [GAMECUBE]
- **RESIDENT EVIL 4** 2004 [MULTI]
- **ONIMUSHA 3** 2003 [MULTI]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Survival-Horror
PLAYERS: 1



CONCEPT

A bright, cartoony vision of a Romeo theme. Think *Dawn Of The Dead* mixed with *Braindead*.

MORE NEWS EMERGES ON CAPCOM'S ROMERO-'EM-UP

Just a few short months of development since our last visit to America's most deadly mall, *Dead Rising's* tone and styling has changed considerably. Once a dark and frightening homage/pastiche/rip-off of George Romero's seminal *Dawn Of The Dead*, *Dead Rising* has transformed into an outlandishly gore-filled spectacle – and is looking all the better for it.

Hero Frank West has undergone some severe facial surgery since we last spent time in his bloody shoes. He's scrubbed up well too, looking more Clooney than Clunes, and a damn sight more heroic. Some may lambaste the change; Frank was the very definition of an everyman before, but survival-horror is full of nobodies coping with horrific situations. Capcom feels it's time for a hero, and we don't disagree.

A hero, that is, that can use everything his imagination can come up with to rid the Willamette Mall of ever-advancing zombies. Frank uses an umbrella, a cash register, a vase, a Lightsaber, garden shears and even a traffic cone to aid his blood-soaked zombicide. And a massive shotgun. It all results in hilarity. *Dead Rising* is the very opposite of realistic; it's big, brash, confident and grotesquely beautiful. The volume of zombies on screen is breathtaking; the ambition of those early screenshots appears to have been carried off with aplomb.

In their quest to survive this horrific outbreak, players must apply strategy to the killing. It may look like a next-gen *State Of Emergency*, but there's more emphasis on crowd management than you might expect. Exploiting gaps in the zombies and picking off the stragglers allows for easier passage. It's a shame to dissect such a visceral and fantastically gory experience, but it shows Capcom has put more thought into *Dead Rising* than screenshots suggest; as with all high quality IPs, *Rising* is expertly designed.

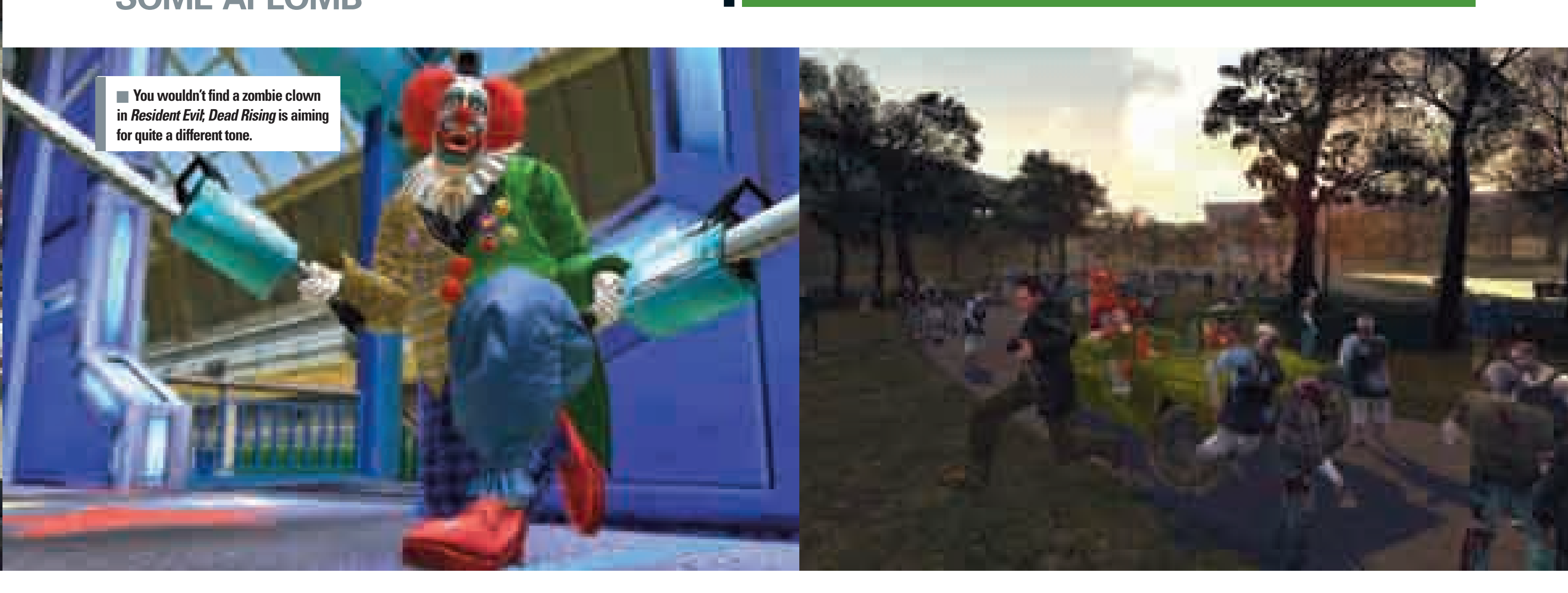
There are still concerns over the longevity of such a one-dimensional concept. While there can't be a man alive who doesn't find the idea of zombie holocaust appealing, we're worried that the constant murder may become tiresome. Capcom promises an open-ended structure; the mall is being touted as a sandbox in which players can decide their own destiny. Do you save the civilians and gain information, or do you lure them into a zombie sea and take snapshots of the ensuing bloodbath for your story (West is a filthy journo, after all)? If implemented skilfully, this unstructured mechanic could turn *Dead Rising* into a much more fulfilling and organic game.

Unfortunately, it has been pushed back till September, so 360 owners wanting to satiate their blood lust will have to spend the summer without. Still, with more development time left, it will be interesting to see how far Capcom takes this concept. If *Dead Rising* can prove more than just a cheap thrill, then the developer's first foray into the next generation will be every bit as successful as its domination of the last.

"THE AMBITION OF THOSE EARLY SCREENSHOTS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN CARRIED OFF, AND WITH SOME APLOMB"

ZOMBIE NATION

***Dead Rising* certainly wears its influence proudly on its sleeve – the mall setting is a direct lift from perhaps the most famous zombie movie of them all, George A Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead*. However, it actually has more in common with the recent remake – particularly in terms of the volume of undead and their ferocity and viciousness. Also, the overt humour is much more knowing and obvious than the original *Dawn's* subtler satire on consumer culture. We've yet to see whether any more obvious references make it into the final code (a cameo from boggle-eyed legend Ken Foree too much to ask for?), but kudos to Capcom for creating the game of many horror fans' dreams.**



You wouldn't find a zombie clown in *Resident Evil*; *Dead Rising* is aiming for quite a different tone.

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, Xbox, PS2, PS3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Rainbow Six continues its drive toward the mainstream audience by combining strategic action with a Las Vegas setting and rounded gameplay.

VIVA LAS VEGAS?

Yes, we know. The gritty realism of *Rainbow Six* goes together with the fluorescent hedonism of Las Vegas about as well as the words 'Halo' and 'Karting', with most cynics already scoffing at a new addition to a series that stumbled with its *Lockdown* mis-step. Rainbow Six strike team remaining stealthy among the showgirls and fruit machines doesn't bear thinking about.

Fortunately, this arranged marriage doesn't have to end in failure, if only because Ubisoft appears to have learnt some lessons from *Lockdown*. For one, this Las Vegas adventure will be more focused. No globe trotting from the war-torn Eastern Bloc to ambiguous Middle Eastern countries, as everything takes place on the neon-lit strip. Terrorists are trying to blow up Las Vegas, you're trying to stop them and it will take an entire game rather than an entire level to do it. No doubt the bright lights of Vegas will allow Ubisoft to tickle the 360's muscle and come up with cute graphical trickery.

Secondly, and more importantly, is the way the AI has been beefed up. *Lockdown* had cruelly been dubbed 'Dumbdown' after the way it pandered to a wider demographic as well as seeing soldiers seemingly forget all the tricks they'd learnt throughout the evolution of the series. Ubisoft has dragged them back to strategy school and retaught them the old lessons along with a few new ones, with terrorists now able to employ flanking and pincer manoeuvres. They'll be using your own tactics against you. Further to that, given that this is Vegas and the place is crawling with high-rollers and tourists, it figures that the AI has been tuned up to adapt. Terrorists can also snatch civilians and use them as human shields. The huge civilian presence in Las Vegas will be what gives outing its unique feel, as you not only have to take out the terrorists but ensure you do it without any collateral damage.

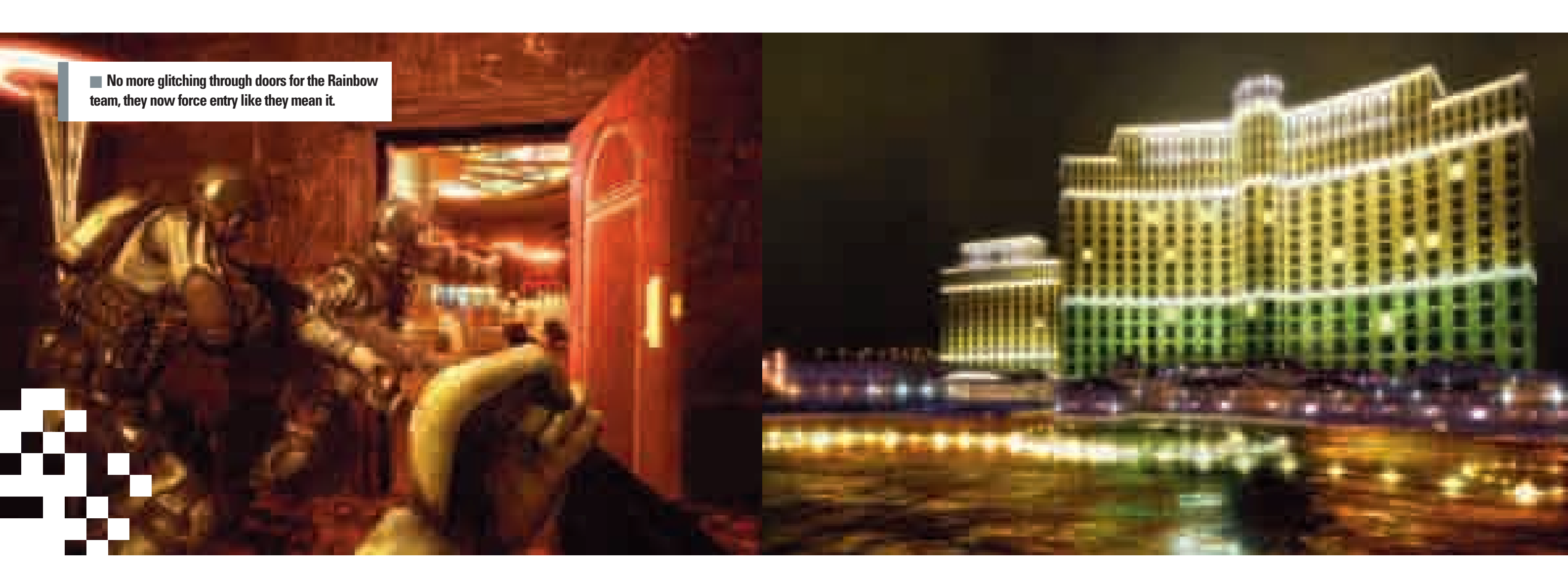
Rainbow Six Vegas will also cut down on the AI errors that plagued *Lockdown*. There will be no more eccentric behaviour that saw soldiers struggling with doors, or taking out their own men – this strike team is efficient and doesn't require you to clean up their mess. The size of your team has dropped to just three members, which helps the action feel less cluttered. Whether this is a good thing or not will depend on your relationship with the series. This should be accessible for newcomers that haven't yet dipped their toes in the *Rainbow Six* waters, but veterans probably won't be happy about the changes.

You still have the ability to give orders assigned on the D-pad – again, symbolic of a drive toward accessibility – and this streamlines the controls so that ordering your men to take cover can be done with one button push. Even so, the emphasis is sliding toward action over strategy. Will this see the series head back in the right direction after the *Lockdown* fiasco? Ubisoft has its work cut out, but if it can keep enough strategy meat on the action bone, it could do the impossible and please long-term fans while still attracting newcomers.

> "THE HUGE CIVILIAN PRESENCE IN LAS VEGAS WILL GIVE THIS ADDITION TO THE SERIES ITS UNIQUE FEEL"

FURTHER RUMOURS

One worrying rumour that's been doing the rounds is that *Rainbow Six Vegas* will continue its push to capture a wider demographic by incorporating a recharging health system as seen in *Halo* or *Call Of Duty 2*. For the unfamiliar, these health systems allow you to automatically recover health for free if you duck out of fire for a while. It worked within *Halo*'s sci-fi settings and was included in *Call Of Duty 2* to cut down on the health-pack hunting that plagued its predecessor… but *Rainbow Six*? It's a tricky inclusion to justify. Some long-term fans are already crossing their fingers hoping this doesn't make it in and turn *Rainbow Six* into an arcade gunner rather than tactical shooter.



No more glitching through doors for the Rainbow team, they now force entry like they mean it.

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS
XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Ubisoft Montreal has grown into a real powerhouse development studio, handling big franchises such as *Splinter Cell, Far Cry* and *Prince Of Persia.* Now at the forefront of Ubisoft's in-house drive, the studio will continue the French company's drive to remain among the big publishers.

HISTORY

- **SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT** 2006 [XBOX 360]
- **FAR CRY INSTINCTS PREDATOR** 2006 [XBOX 360]
- **RAYMAN DS** 2005 [DS]

While there's no telling how the action versus strategy balance will work, the game looks fantastic.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HIGH ROLLER

RAINBOW SIX + LAS VEGAS + EFFICIENCY = RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

"TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX VEGAS WILL BE THE BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH ALL NEXT-GENERATION GAMES WILL BE MEASURED"
UBISOFT, PRESS RELEASE

There's still plenty of opportunity for ducking and diving around the lights of Vegas.

TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION



Of course, a large number of older, more classic characters join the new ones in *Dark Resurrection*, but the balance has been redressed.

"A VARIETY OF NEW GAME MODES DELIVER A 'PLAY ANYTIME, ANYWHERE' EXPERIENCE"

SONY, PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TEKKEN TIMES TEKKEN

TEKKEN 5 + LILI x THE PSP = TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ From *Pac-Man* to *Donkey Konga*, Namco has proved an enduring name in the industry. Although the firm's heyday was back in the Eighties, it continues to develop games for many modern publishers. Previously, Sony has published Namco games under the *Ridge Racer* and *Soul Calibur* brands.

HISTORY

- **SOUL CALIBUR III** 2005 [PlayStation2]
- **TALES OF SYMPHONIA** 2004 [GameCube]
- **TEKKEN 4** 2002 [PlayStation2]



■ The *Dark Resurrection* environments are widely considered to be better than those in *Tekken 5* – more varied, too.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: Summer '06
GENRE: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ The latest *Tekken* arcade conversion controversially debuts on the system and looks to be *the* PSP game of 2006.

THEM'S SOME DARK SKILLS

Tekken: Dark Resurrection **hasn't been out in the arcades for very long – just three months, in fact – and yet already the home console conversion is being touted as one of Sony's key releases for 2006.** Hold fast though, fight fans, it's not coming out on the format that we were all expecting. Instead of emerging on the PlayStation2, the arcade conversion of *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* will actually debut on the PSP. This might strike you as something of a strange decision as the handheld machine simply isn't capable of delivering the sorts of ridiculously high-quality graphics that have characterised the arcade *Tekken* games, however, it would appear that this might just be the key title for the PSP in the coming year. As yet, the PSP doesn't yet have a standout beat-'em-up, but *Dark Resurrection* is looking set to deliver on that front.

Despite its downsizing, the game will remain arcade authentic. All 35 fighters will make it into the game (including new characters Lili and Dragunov), each with their complete move list. The many lush environments of the arcade version will also be available to fight in, with the addition of a few PSP-exclusive ones. The arcade controls and features will be preserved – *Resurrection* is a considerable step up from *Tekken 5* in terms of sheer polish, and hopefully players will be able to discern the leap in quality despite the different format.

The character balance is much better in *Resurrection* than it was in *Tekken 5*, and it's a considerable aesthetic improvement as well. There's twice the number of stages, and far more customisation items (all of which will transfer to the PlayStation Portable), including vaguely *Dragon Ball Z* 'auras' for the characters. There will also be a number of PSP-exclusive features such as additional items and, crucially for fans, exclusive opening and Story mode videos. The new characters also add considerably to *Dark Resurrection's* appeal for fans, and the welcome return of Armor King from *Tekken Tag Tournament* is likely to turn a few frowns upside down.

We are slightly worried about the controls, though. You see, with no option to use a stick-based arcade controller like you can on the PlayStation2, it occurs to us that, should the controls be unsuitable for some players, it may render the game completely unplayable for them. Although the four-button and digi-pad combination could work acceptably in theory, the PlayStation Portable has yet to prove to us that it can handle a good beat-'em-up – indeed, *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max* had to ship with a special sticky D-pad attachment.

> "SONY IS THROWING ITS FULL AND SUBSTANTIAL WEIGHT BEHIND TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION"

Either way, Sony is throwing its full and substantial weight behind *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* in terms of the marketing and hype it is proposing to stir up. As far as the publisher is concerned, this is going to be the title of the year, and for fans it will, indeed, be a key game.

We here at **games™** are very much hoping that Namco can pull off the sheer scope of this arcade-to-PSP translation effectively, but should it suffer the control issues that we fear, even the most comprehensive and faithful conversion will go to waste on the machine. If it's carried off well, though, *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* could just as easily become a killer app for the PlayStation Portable – something that Sony desperately needs if the machine is to close that gap on the DS in Japan.

MULTI-PUNISHMENT

There's a definite emphasis on multi-player features in *Dark Resurrection* – being able to beat up friends wherever you like fits in with the game's 'any time, any place' ethos. Via the PSP's wireless communication, players can take each other on with any of the game's characters in any of the stages. Of course, a beat-'em-up just isn't a beat-'em-up without the ability to play other people, so we're relieved to see such importance placed on functionality. It's not yet clear whether or not we'll be able to play online or obtain downloadable content, though it's expected that Sony will release further details of its online functionality closer to the game's release.

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE



Presumably the airdrop view will look similar to this one. Not much else to say really.

Look at that face. Nothing says 'great gameplay' like detailed characters. Maybe.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

AN INSIGHT INTO AIRBORNE'S PROGRAMMING

MOH: FRONTLINE + COMBAT ELITE: WWII x XBOX 360 = MOH: AIRBORNE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Where would the games industry be without EA? Probably languishing in the alternative entertainment sector in truth. Still, whether the Canadian games giant does more good than harm is still up for debate, as its predictable approach to developing becomes increasingly frustrating.

HISTORY

- **MOH: EUROPEAN ASSAULT** 2005 [PS2, GC, XBOX]
- **MOH: RISING SUN** 2003 [PS2, GC, XBOX]
- **MOH: FRONTLINE** 2002 [PS2, GC, XBOX]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PS2, PS3, Xbox, GameCube, Revolution, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

This is seemingly another World War FPS but with the added gimmick of being able to drop in anywhere on a battlefield via airdrops.

EA'S BIG GUN TAKES A PROVERBIAL LEAP INTO THE NEXT GEN

It would seem that the excitement of the next generation is in danger of being dulled by the sullen feeling of familiarity. The buzz of the latest hardware is already being drowned out by wholly unimaginative software line-ups, and war games in particular seem to have a rather turgid and predictable presence. Despite the visual magnificence of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* and the competence of *Call Of Duty 2*, there's a real danger of the genre losing any edge it might have had before it's had a chance to excel. Already on the shelves there's *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*, *The Outfit* and *Blazing Angels*, as well as the two already mentioned. On top of this, a next-gen *Brothers In Arms* has been announced, all of which leaves us wondering whether or not we care about whatever gimmicks EA has decided to add to its next-gen *Medal Of Honor* effort.

We're tempted to say that there's no aspect of warfare left that needs to be explored through a couple of analogue sticks and a few buttons, but EA thinks differently. The latest *MOH* is keen to get jiggy with parachute regiments, hence the full title *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*. This means that players will be able to fly about the battlefield at their leisure and opt to drop whenever they like. Depending on where you land, your mission will be different.

It sounds novel, made more interesting by the fact that you control the drop. But then what's that in real terms? 20 seconds of gameplay? What happens when you hit the ground? Will the game maintain the distinction between itself and other war games? We'd like to believe so, but sadly we reckon it'll play like a hi-res version of previous *Medal Of Honor*s. EALA vice president Patrick Gilmore is optimistic: "By fully controlling the airdrop from your very first step through landing, *Airborne* adds a new dimension of player choice by letting you decide where every mission begins and how it plays out."

The idea of deciding where missions begin seems interesting, but surely it'll just be a case of 'same mission, different start point' – a much less-exciting way of looking at it. Naturally, there'll be stunning views when you're on the plane, waiting to plummet onto some foreign land – EA never skimps on the chance to impress with trailer-friendly FMV – but there'll need to be more on offer to stand out on an already suffocating genre.

The destined-to-be-award-winning trooper that you play goes by the name of Boyd Travers – a useless morsel of information, but one that EA seems keen to hammer home. *Medal Of Honor* games have always tried to emulate the movies, and *Airborne* carries on that tradition, touted as it is as a, "cinematic, story-driven game". Again, this will no doubt lead to aesthetic beauty, but with *MOH* it was the gameplay not the visuals that needed improving.

Perhaps we're being too harsh; maybe we should be more open-minded. This is, after all, the series' first venture onto next-gen consoles, and presumably EA will be working hard to make a big noise when *Airborne* arrives in the winter. It will have to be incredibly good to achieve real success in what will be the first proper next-gen Christmas. Indeed, if as much time has been spent on the game mechanics as on the facial features – which are stunning by the way – then we could be in for a right old treat. Could be.

"THERE WILL NEED TO BE A LOT MORE ON OFFER TO STAND OUT ON AN ALREADY SUFFOCATING GENRE"

WELCOME BACK REALISM

EA likes to boast a lot. This time the industry behemoth is bragging about its dedication to a realistic World War II environment, and on top of that how the development team, "continues to ensure that the ideals and integrity of the prestigious Congressional Medal of Honor are accurately reflected in the game". The producer of *Airborne* has reportedly spent some time speaking to many experts to make certain that the game is historically accurate, with Captain Dale Dye – technical advisor on the previous seven *MOH* games – leading the charge for authenticity again. So was he the one responsible for the Invincibility mode on the last game then?



We're positive that the game will look great. Just like most next-gen games then.



RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR



Generals can accumulate 'glory' by taking down troops, sacking cities and causing mayhem.

THERE'S A HERO IN ALL OF US

It's a year since we checked in on Stainless Steel's attempt to redefine real-time strategy, *Rise & Fall*. In the past twelve months, this unique take on the genre has picked up a subtitle, an extra layer of visual sheen and a raft of new features.

As has been well publicised, *Rise & Fall's* main hook is Hero mode. Aware that battle is just as much about individuals as it is armies, Stainless Steel has implemented a mechanic that allows players to take control of an army's General at any time during combat. The camera switches from the traditional high viewpoint to an over-the-shoulder shot, leaving players free to hack and slash their way through crowds of enemies. Control becomes a case of WASD and a few strike keys, effectively including an entire (albeit limited) *Dynasty Warriors*-style melee combat game in a comprehensive RTS.

The reasons for this bold design choice are twofold. Firstly, and most importantly for Midway, it offers something entirely new to the RTS field. The genre is shrouded with negative stigmas, however wrong they may be. Stuffy, boring and disengaging are such criticisms of real-time strategy that *Rise & Fall* is looking to avoid. Midway believes that the inclusion of Hero mode will be sufficient to attract the action-orientated PC crowd while simultaneously offering the *Warcraft*/*Command & Conquer* fanbase a distinctly different strategy flavour.

The second reason is gameplay based. Hero mode is a tool to gain a strategic and tactical advantage on the battleground, and as such, players must determine when it will have the most impact. In the previous build, many moons ago, it was far too easy to jump into the boots of your General and slice your way through hundreds of infantrymen with no penalty. Stainless Steel has addressed this potential source of imbalance by ensuring that, "Hero mode will take no more than 10-15 per cent of the total game time". This makes it more a surgical strike than a simple gameplay choice, enhancing the strategy considerably.

After all, *Rise & Fall* IS a strategy game, and this reduction of 'hero time' has allowed the overarching real-time engine to shine. It's glorious to look at – cities and fields are picked out in bright, lush textures; the detailed character models move realistically; and there's an unparalleled level of interaction between troops and their surroundings. Elephants knock down trees, soldiers can be seen actually loading and firing siege weapons, chariots plough through formations sending infantrymen flying like mangled skittles… it all makes for a very engaging and immersive experience. Stainless Steel is attempting to make a 'cinematic RTS', and from what we've seen so far, it may just have succeeded.

No amount of drama or cinematic sensibility would matter, though, if the core strategy engine were lacking. *Rise & Fall* doesn't look like it will disappoint in this area either. Generals can command hundreds of troops over land or sea with accurate artificial intelligence and a wealth of formation and deployment options. The naval combat in particular is superb; unique to the land-based warfare, and completely integrated within the flow of battle.

Midway's superb-looking title looks set to ascend the upper echelons of the RTS ladder when it arrives this summer. *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War* may even pick up a few new real-time converts along the way.

"THIS LOOKS SET TO ASCEND THE UPPER ECHELONS OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Stainless Steel Studios
RELEASE: 28 June
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

A high concept RTS with beautiful visuals, *Rise & Fall* has the potential to change the way the entire genre is perceived.

REAL TIME FOR HEROES

Each of *Rise & Fall's* campaign missions sees players take control of one of history's great leaders. As Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar you can cut down swathes of enemies with a few simple hits on the keyboard, and also deal out specific heroic commands to your troops. For example, a brief tap of a function key lets out a battle cry to motivate your entire army. The time spent in Hero mode has been significantly reduced to redress the game's balance, but is nevertheless *Rise & Fall's* very unique selling point. It does feel slightly strange dealing out death with Cleopatra, though.

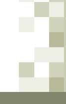


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Working out of Boston, Stainless Steel studios has its roots firmly entrenched in the RTS camp. In its five-year history, the company has only worked on three titles (including *Rise & Fall*), dedicating its time to making games that are as comprehensive as possible.

HISTORY

- **RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR** 2006 [PC]
- **EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD** 2003 [PC]
- **EMPIRE EARTH** 2001 [PC]



"OUR GOAL IS TO ATTRACT A BROAD GAMING AUDIENCE BY CREATING AN OUTSTANDING, IMMERSIVE FILM-LIKE RTS EXPERIENCE"

MIDWAY, PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

RISING DAMP

COMMAND & CONQUER + DYNASTY WARRIORS x HEROES = RISE & FALL

By law, real-time strategy games shouldn't look this good. What simply stunning visuals.

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC



There are three different discpilines to get to grips with: strong warriors, stealthy assassins and, er, magical magicians.

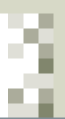


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Started in 1999 in Lyon, France, Arkane was an eight-man studio that won some critical and commercial success with its debut title *Arx Fatalis*. The game won a number of awards, and Arkane was nominated for Rookie Studio Of The Year at the 2002 Game Developers Conference.

HISTORY

ARX FATALIS 2002 [MULTI]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Arkane
RELEASE: June
GENRE: First-Person Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (2-32 Online)

CONCEPT

Set in the *Might And Magic* universe, *Dark Messiah* is a fully immersive, action-led RPG for the console-savvy generation.

AN RPG WITH THE COURAGE TO STAND UP AND FIGHT

The RPG has never been the most inclusive of genres. The depth and scope, as well as the inherent nerdishness of it all, have always left socially well-adjusted gamers cold. The success of the *Lord Of The Rings* films has gone some way to relieving this stigma, boosting the profile of fantasy to borderline trendy, but as technology improves, the accessibility of straight RPGs is only getting worse. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, for example, boasts around 200 hours of gameplay – impressive, but hardly tempting to an RPG virgin.

It's a problem that had the folks at Arkane scratching their heads. Combining the swords and sorcery of an RPG with the frenetic action of an FPS – and utilising the Source engine developed by Valve for the peerless *Half-Life 2* – *Dark Messiah* attempts to make the fantasy universe of *Might And Magic* accessible to the console generation.

Clearly not wanting this to be a throwaway experience, Arkane has gone to great lengths to add new layers of depth to the gameplay. Gamers can play in one of three styles: Warrior, Assassin or Magician. Each has its own set of skills which can be acquired with the points awarded after each level. Warriors focus on strength, and can acquire swords, axes and staffs; assassins require stealth, using knives, bows and shadows; while magicians use spells, from fire and ice to charms and telekinesis. If you fight well, your adrenaline meter rises, increasing your attack power and giving you access to devastating fatality moves.

This multiplicity of styles has been considered in the game's design, so in any situation there'll be several ways to progress. One example had orcs advancing across a bridge toward a shack ringed by a narrow ledge. The warrior cut the bridge, sending the enemy tumbling to a watery death; the assassin shot an arrow with a rope attached into the shack's rafters, climbed up, moved to the shadows and used the bow to kill swiftly and silently; and the magician lured the orcs onto the ledge, before covering the floor with ice, sending enemies skidding to their fates. How you develop your character's skills is up to you, but such consideration for depth of character and combat rewards repeat play.

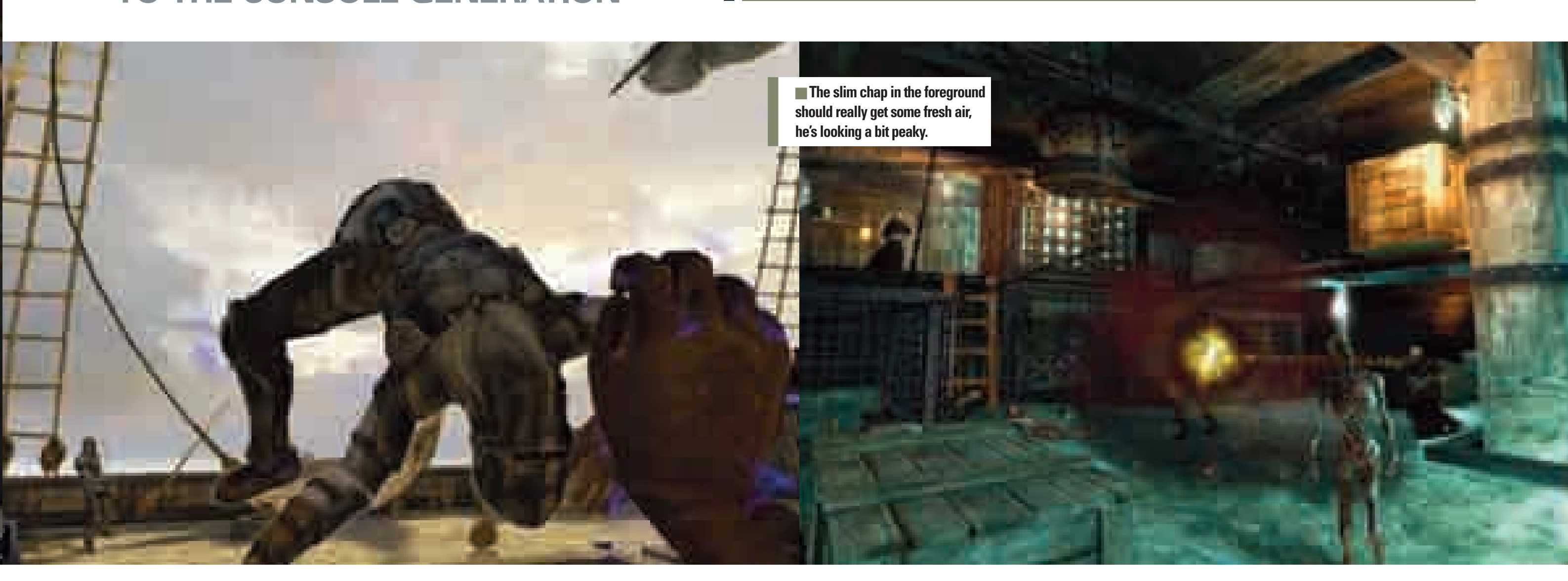
First-person action games seldom boast convincing hand-to-hand combat, yet *Dark Messiah's* success relies heavily upon it, and from what we've seen the swordplay has just the right feeling of contact and depth. Couple this with interactive environments that allow you to hurl barrels, and topple pillars, and the combat seems to strike a good balance between variety, ease and fun.

Perhaps it's that Arkane is still a rookie, but it's rare to see a development team with such enthusiasm. Visually the game is stunning, perfectly capturing the crumbling ruins and underground caverns of the *Might And Magic* world, but with a depth and excitement of gameplay that should give *Dark Messiah* an appeal beyond the boundaries of an RPG audience.

"DARK MESSIAH TRIES TO MAKE THE FANTASY UNIVERSE OF MIGHT AND MAGIC ACCESSIBLE TO THE CONSOLE GENERATION"

DEAD RISING

Supplementing Story mode is an innovative multi-player. Along with standard free-for-all combat, up to 32 players can compete online. Split into two teams – humans versus the undead – battle takes place over five maps: team strongholds at either end, a human town and the undead catacombs one step further in, with neutral territory in the middle. When a team wins a map its army moves a step closer to the enemy stronghold. Lose and it takes a step back. Like a tug of war, but with more decapitations. Each map has interactive elements, with the siege towers proving most impressive. Seeing 16 players spilling over the fortress walls to battle an army of zombies provoked worrying levels of excitement.



The slim chap in the foreground should really get some fresh air, he's looking a bit peaky.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR



Messing with giant trolls will get you killed. That's just good common MMO sense.

MASSIVELY MIDDLE EARTH

Before Peter Jackson changed the face of mainstream cinema with his wildly successful adaptations of *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, the fantasy aesthetic was confined to the realms of the geek. The average person on the street would have baulked at the thought of Orcs, dwarves, dungeons and dragons as the genre carried a negative stigma – thanks, largely, to images of beardy role-players and card collectors. Since *The Fellowship Of The Ring* hit movie theatres, however, you simply can't move for large-scale fantasy battles or fantasy novel adaptations.

The MMORPG genre finds itself in a similar situation to pre-Jackson fantasy. It has a devout fanbase, incredible scope and a world of emerging possibilities, but is completely detached from the mainstream (even mainstream gaming) consciousness, certainly in the west. With *Shadows Of Angmar*, Frodo and co's first foray into the online universe, Turbine Inc. is hoping it can severely shift that paradigm and push MMOs into the limelight. And what better IP to use than *The Lord Of The Rings*?

The game itself is shaping up to be fairly standard MMO fare: create a hero or heroine, take them online, then lose 200 hours of you life. What sets it apart is the rich resource of history and reference that the *Rings* licence provides. Players will begin their online careers by building an adventurer, either in one of the established classes (elf, dwarf, human, etc) or a mixture of races, and traipse into the Eriador overworld to do what MMO players do: meet people, make teams and lose social lives. Tolkien fans will be excited by the news that Turbine has diligently recreated The Shire, Rivendell, Moria and many other recognisable areas from the movies and novels allowing players to effectively visit the sets of the films without having to make the sizeable trek to New Zealand.

As exciting as the thought of wandering around Middle Earth sounds, one area where this game may fall down is the lack of antagonistic characters for players to control. Turbine's title is very much entrenched in the good versus evil camp and, as such, only allows users to control characters who fall on the side of righteousness. Therefore, you won't be able to ride around as a Ring Wraith or join a band of vicious Orcs – which is a shame. Perhaps we will see a *City Of Villains*-style update in the future.

Although the thought of terrorising American teenagers as a giant troll is extremely appealing but sadly not possible, the promise of a real-time combat engine that 'amplifies the effectiveness of groups and fellowships' certainly sounds more interesting than your typical RPG fighting. In an ideal world, users would be able to recreate the battles of Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith, but we suspect that may be a few years off yet. As long as we can level up enough to kick Strider levels of Orc and goblin ass, then we'll be more than happy.

When *Shadows Of Angmar* launches later this year, the MMO genre may well see a huge upturn of interest within this country, which is a positive situation for consumers. As with any property, the larger the market the more developers and publishers will be willing to take risks. If *Angmar* takes off, not only will we have a solid Middle Earth MMO to hack through, there's a strong possibility that we could see some very interesting takes on the genre in the not too distant future.

"THE MMO GENRE MAY WELL SEE A HUGE UPTURN OF INTEREST IN THIS COUNTRY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Turbine Inc.
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multi-player

CONCEPT

Codemasters has taken hold of the publishing reins for Turbine's mammoth take on Tolkien's Middle Earth.

CAST OF THOUSANDS

One very interesting element to *Shadows Of Angmar* is the inclusion of recognisable characters (friend and foe) in the game world. During an online career, it will be possible to bump into the likes of Tom Bombadil, Bilbo and Elrond, as well as members of the Fellowship itself. Whether AI or real people will control these characters is still unknown, but we can already imagine the stories of taking down a troll with Legolas or coming face to face with the Nazgul. It's moments like these that define the MMO experience, and with such a rich tapestry from which to draw inspiration, Turbine Inc is in quite an enviable position.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Turbine Inc. is fast becoming the leading light in MMORPG development. With *Dungeons And Dragons Online* already under its belt, the Massachusetts-based firm has plunged head first into the vast realm of Middle Earth for a title that could break MMOs into the mainstream.

HISTORY

- **DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS ONLINE** 2006 [PC]
- **ASHERON'S CALL 2: FALLEN KINGS** 2002 [PC]
- **ASHERON'S CALL: DARK MAJESTY** 2001 [PC]

"FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF YOUR FAVOURITE TOLKIEN HERO. MARK YOUR OWN PLACE IN HISTORY"

CODEMASTERS, PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GOOD LORD

WORLD OF WARCRAFT + PETER JACKSON x ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS = SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

■ If Turbine can recreate that famous arachnid scene in game, then players will be in for a shocking treat.

CITY LIFE



Look at the traffic. It doesn't matter where you're going; you're going to be late.

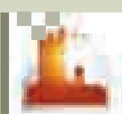
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LIVE AND LET LIVE

SIM CITY – CLASSES + GRIDS = CITY LIFE

"CITY LIFE BRINGS AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF DETAIL AND A HIGH LEVEL OF ANIMATION"

CITY LIFE, PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded ten years ago, France-based publisher/developer Monte Cristo has become well known for its management and strategy titles. As *City Life* shows, the company is currently focusing on life simulation, builders and tactical management in an effort to appeal to a wider European audience.

HISTORY



■ **7 SINS** 2005 [PC]
■ **MEDIEVAL LORDS** 2004 [PC]
■ **FAME ACADEMY** 2003 [Multi]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Monte Cristo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: May
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ It's another way to play God as you create your very own city from scratch and attempt to manage the suitably picky populace effectively.

MONTE CRISTO ATTEMPTS TO LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST

There are plenty of games out there capable of sucking up your time. Many an hour can be lost sitting in front of a screen, and PC titles are extremely good at forcing you to take a seat and stay there. The PC is home to many genres that excel at performing in this way, and involving RTSs, MMORPGs and strategy titles spring up frequently to lure you in.

Of all these genres and titles, arguably the most popular are those that involve a level of resource management. Surprising, considering that observing trends and analysing graphs for long periods of time is deemed 'not fun'. Of course, we know better. There's something about resource management titles that pull you in, whether it's the fact that you're able to create your own land from scratch or whether you're proving that if, for some reason, you did happen to find yourself in charge, the world would be a far nicer place to be. There is a lot to be said for these complex titles.

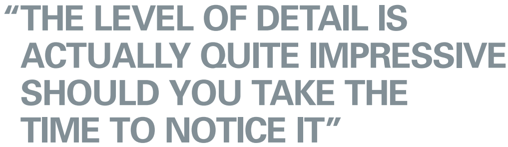
Little more proof is needed than the success of the *Sim City* series. The original managed to capture the hearts of an entire generation of gamer to the point where, despite hardware limitations, near every format got its own version to show off. Since then, many games have tried to rival its greatness – none have succeeded in any notable way – but now it seems that Monte Cristo is going to give it a try…

City Life certainly looks ambitious. At a glance it seems to be attempting little more than recent similar titles – such as *Tycoon City: New York* – have offered, but on closer inspection it seems the team is throwing everything it can at the title. It may pay off.

Monte Cristo is known for its PC titles, so it's no surprise that all the regular features are making an appearance. Zooming right out to view the current state of your creation before rolling in close to watch a gang of protesters is as smooth as your PC allows, and the level of detail is quite impressive should you take the time to notice it. But, as we said, these are regulars that simply allow *City Life* to compete adequately; it's the social aspects here that make the game that little bit more interesting.

As well as building your city to accommodate the correct amount of vehicles, and keeping your city folk happy, you'll also need to allow for the different classes that inhabit your town. Homeless types don't wish to have their poverty rubbed in their faces by having to reside next to the city's elite, and the honest working class really doesn't want to get involved with the creative nature of the beetle-driving hippies – it makes for a more tactical game and potentially allows for some spectacular street brawls and riots.

As previously mentioned, this is an ambitious project for Monte Cristo, and although initial signs look promising, *City Life* is competing in a tough market and must deliver on its promises and more if it wishes to stand out from the rest of the titles on the shelves.



"THE LEVEL OF DETAIL IS ACTUALLY QUITE IMPRESSIVE SHOULD YOU TAKE THE TIME TO NOTICE IT"

BOXED IN

What Monte Cristo's *City Life* is also offering PC owners is the opportunity to build your city in your own unique way. Yes, of course, we are completely aware that a great many videogames do already offer this type of feature, but most limit you to erecting buildings and laying down roads in a grid formation. *City Life*, however, will allow you to build wherever you please – within reason, of course – meaning that your paths and roads can be as nonsensical as you want them to be. Ultimately, your city will probably be a little bit rubbish should you go down this route, but at least the option's there.



■ We suggest you have firemen in your city. We think this was the classic chip pan and water error.

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS



■ Rockstar is the most notorious development studio of them all.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PONG

VIRTUA TENNIS – WIMBLEDON + ROCKSTAR = ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS

"A PURER, MORE VISCERAL EXPERIENCE THAT SIMPLY WAS NOT POSSIBLE PREVIOUSLY"
SAM HOUSER, ROCKSTAR GAMES

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS

XBOX 360



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Responsible for *GTA*, *Manhunt* and the upcoming *Bully*, Rockstar is synonymous with publicity and controversy. Not many would have the audacity to place the tag 'Rockstar Games Presents' before the name of its game, but that sums up the impact that the company has had on the videogames industry.

HISTORY

■ **THE WARRIORS** 2005 [Multi]
■ **GTA: SAN ANDREAS** 2004 [Multi]
■ **GTA: VICE CITY** 2002 [Multi]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
RELEASE: 26 May
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Rockstar has seen fit to temporarily abandon its usual Jack Thompson-baiting fare and concentrate on making the perfect table tennis sim.

ROCKSTAR PRESENTS WHAT NOW?

When news began to circulate that Rockstar was gearing up to announce its first next-gen title, the rumour mill went into hyper-drive. Murmurings of *GTA* and *Manhunt* sequels could be heard across the industry. Some cynics predicted another *Midnight Club* while others pined for a new *Red Dead Revolver*. No one predicted a stripped-down budget-priced table tennis sim. And if they did, they were lying.

As crazy as this bizarre announcement was, the words: "concentrating the hardware's power on one activity with the aim of doing that better than it's ever been done", spoken by Rockstar founder, Sam Houser, certainly sparked some curiosity. In a consumer climate that constantly berates the industry's lack of originality, a bold move like this from one of the most established software houses should be applauded.

If Rockstar produced anything less than a perfect sim of this marginal sporting endeavour, that applause would quickly dissipate to a solitary slow clap. Thankfully, after a lengthy hands-on at the pleasure of Rockstar's London outfit, **games™** can confirm that *Table Tennis* elicits the same reaction from players as the other pinnacles of videogame sport. *Pro Evo*, *Fight Night* and even EA's *NHL* games capture the essence of why we're so obsessed with sport and competition – the drama. A classic sporting encounter tells a story akin to a great piece of literature or cinema – there are heroes and villains, twists and turns, and the outcome cannot be predicted. While it may seem contrived to liken a table tennis game to a seminal work of cinema, there's no disguising the raw emotion that the game evokes – even at this early stage. If a title has players jumping out of their seats, palms sweating, trash being talked and crowds hollering, then it's doing what it set out to achieve. And, after three incredibly intense back-and-forth matches, all of the above had been ticked off the checklist.

This sense of drama and competition is born out of the game's balanced mechanics which replicate the sport superbly, capturing the nuances of spin, positioning and timing as accurately as *Virtua Tennis*. Visually, it's reminiscent of *Top Spin*'s fluidly animated players with flowing t-shirts but a distinct lack of soul. We're assured that the finishing touches are still being applied but, as it stands, *Table Tennis* errs more on the side of functionality than beauty.

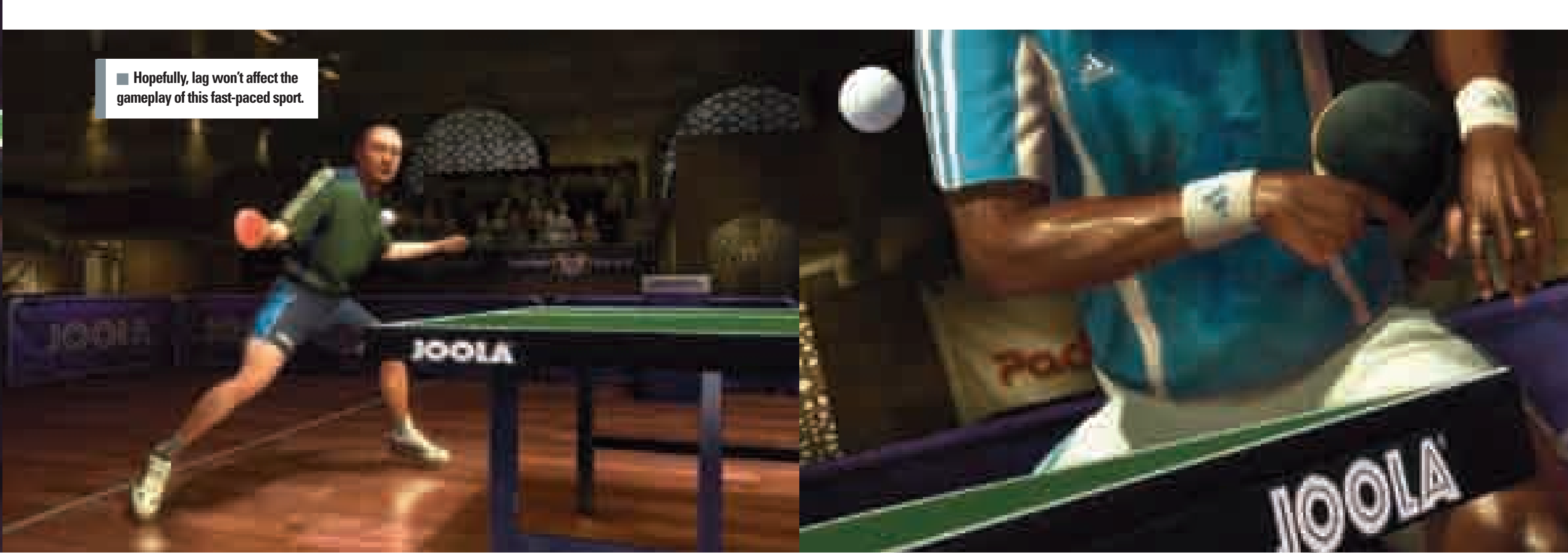
Rockstar is touting its first foray into the next generation as an essential online title, and there's no doubt that it has the potential to be a compelling Xbox Live experience. The only concern lies with the possibility of lag hampering such a reaction-based game – it would be unacceptable to lose a vital point because of a drop in frame-rate.

Still, *Table Tennis* has already proven a very welcome surprise. If the online functions can match the compelling offline multi-player, then we could well be looking at yet another Rockstar success story.

"CAPTURING THE NUANCES OF SPIN, POSITIONING AND TIMING AS ACCURATELY AS TOP SPIN OR, INDEED, VIRTUA TENNIS"

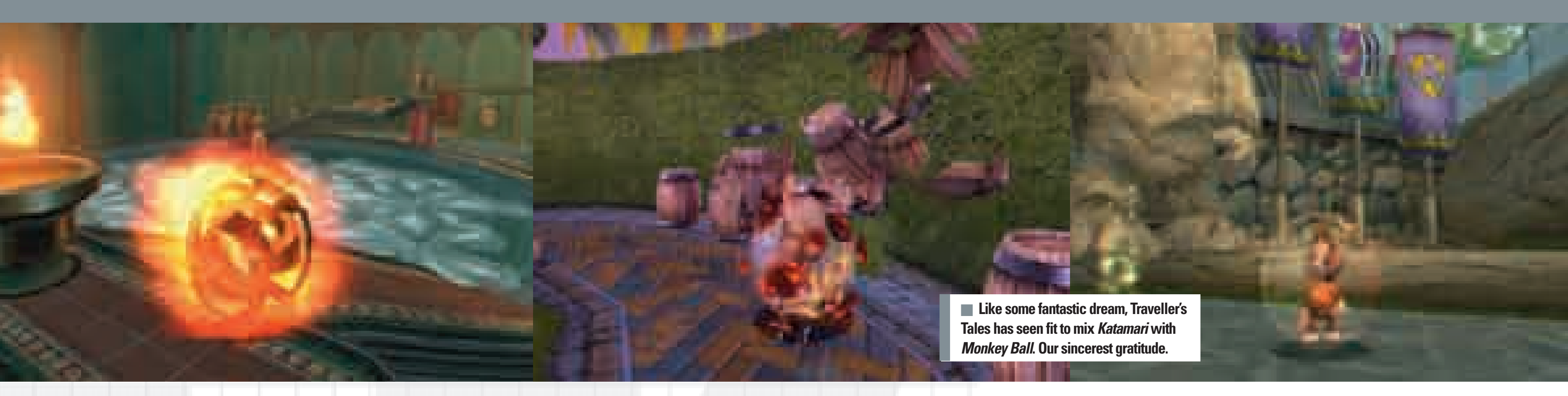
TOP SPINNING

Real life table tennis is a surprisingly tactical game, with devious use of spin and counter-spin to try and force openings. Rockstar has captured this element of the sport perfectly, offering one face button for each type of spin, be it top, back or the two sides. When a certain type of spin is applied to the ball, it flashes with the colour of the button pressed, giving the opponent a split second to counteract the movement of the ball and gain an advantage on the point. Countering backspin with backspin will defeat the purpose of the original shot, and shift momentum back in your favour. There's a lot more to table tennis than meets the eye.



■ Hopefully, lag won't affect the gameplay of this fast-paced sport.

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE



Like some fantastic dream, Traveller's Tales has seen fit to mix *Katamari* with *Monkey Ball*. Our sincerest gratitude.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, PSP, GC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales
RELEASE: June
GENRE: Platform/Puzzler
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

The ever-popular primates have been given a whole world to roll about in courtesy of UK-based Traveller's Tales.

THE ROLL DEEP CREW

PS2 **Following our massive exclusive (that GonGon is the son of a pirate), last issue, we felt it only right to take a closer look at Sega's latest outsourced project, *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*.** Having spent time with Traveller's Tales' effort, we can now confirm that it's potentially the ultimate package for fans of the spherically bound simian crew.

Wisely, Sega has included a pleasing chunk of traditional *Monkey Ball* action – there are 50 new puzzle 'trays' (as they are now known) and a smattering of party modes to appease the monkey hardcore – but it's the *Adventure* moniker that has really sparked interest. It's essentially a 3D platformer with hub worlds, NPC challenge requests and items to collect, but the crucial difference is in the control. Manoeuvring the monkey ball around the bright, colourful environments takes as much skill and dexterity as any puzzle tray and, as such, the Story mode revolves around challenges that require careful manipulation of the analogue stick above all else.

Imagine a game with a similar structure to *Jak And Daxter* or *Mario 64* but with a completely different method of input, and that's *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* in a nutshell. In order to provide some variety, Sega has introduced a spell-casting system (you might remember some of the incantations from *Monkey Ball 2*'s cut-scenes) that changes the state of your ball. During our brief time with the game, we witnessed AiAi casting a spell that doubled the size of his ball, allowing him to travel across a section of wide railing. Later, the same simian managed to cover his ball in small suckers, turning it into an ingenious mixture of a Katamari (picking up litter) and Samus Aran (scaling previously unassailable walls). Sega is promising many more 'states' for the balls which opens up myriad gameplay possibilities, lending the game a very *Zelda*/*Metroid* feel – searching the environments for high ledges and inaccessible platforms and taking note of their locations for future exploration.

To even mention *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* in the same esteem as Nintendo's masterworks suggests that Traveller's Tales has produced a title that may well defy expectations. We eagerly await our opportunity to fully explore the monkey kingdom in the summer months.

"POTENTIALLY THE ULTIMATE PACKAGE FOR FANS OF THE SPHERICALLY BOUND SIMIAN CREW"



Surely the finest sight we've ever seen. Monkeys in dodgems. Nothing more needs to be said.

Monkey Target makes a more than welcome return – in revamped form, no less.


eMag

THE GUILD 2



There are five character classes, each with specific skills. Of course, you can always hire peasants to do the work for you.

NOW WITH A WHOLE DYNASTY'S WORTH OF CORRUPTION

Medieval Europe was not a very nice place. Quite apart from all the disease, war and infant mortality, corruption was rife in the halls of power. The easiest way to attain power was through murder, bribery and general debauchery, and so a morally sound political leader was as rare as a meal that didn't involve maggots.

Back in 2002, 4Head Studios portrayed the Middle Age in *The Guild*, an RTS sandbox title that, although conceptually sound, lacked the polish and consistency that we've come to expect from our strategy games. Many found its depth and complexity daunting, and were left confused by the lack of a clear progressive structure.

In the first game, Sandbox mode was the only option and it caused structural problems. This time the developer hopes that a dedicated, mission-led Campaign mode will help ease gamers into this complex 'life sim'. With a more conventional structure, the studio has incorporated changes and new features designed to expand the title's fanbase, which is currently concentrated in central Europe. Before, the player was an invisible master, now it is a medieval person seeking to expand his or her power through any means possible.

For those unfamiliar with the series, *The Guild* is essentially a social RTS. In the pursuit of power, your handcrafted character must set up a business, become a well-known figure and eventually involve themself in the political life of circa-1400 Nottinghamshire where the game is set. The unusual thing about *The Guild* is that it's genuinely open ended; you don't have to do anything much, and if you do decide to run for mayor or set up a business, you can do it however you like: extortion, threats, bribery, thievery or, heaven forbid, honest means (although thieving, killing and pillaging are inevitably most fun). Actions do have distinct repercussions – jail or even execution is the penalty for serious crimes, and should your avatar be caught with their hands dirty it could ruin (or end) their life.

Consequently, one of the game's central concepts is that of your 'dynasty'. Although you create your first character – choosing from a variety of skills and professions to better equip them for small-scale world domination – that character will die relatively quickly. To continue your legacy you must marry and have children – once part of your dynasty, other characters become directly controllable as well. Three 'inner circle' characters (say, your character, your spouse and your son) can be available for control at any one time, so while one takes care of the business another can focus on a political career, while the third covers his back and dusts over all of his misdeeds.

It's the depth of this title that proves most intriguing; while your dynasty conducts its business, other competing families wander around in real-time, making it perfectly possible for you to send henchmen to spy on (or even murder) rivals as they go about their lives. We were shown an enormous, if slightly bewildering, array of possibilities at the game's first showing. Eliminating a political rival, for instance, can be done through any means from sending someone to kill them to bribing their superiors to fire them to seducing their spouse and ruining their chances of producing children.

The game runs the risk of scaring players away with its sheer depth, much like the last one. Though if it proves enthralling as well as comprehensive, *The Guild 2* could prove a successful RTS as well as an enduringly unique one. We await its release with cautious optimism.

"IT IS THE SHEER DEPTH OF THIS TITLE THAT PROVES ITS MOST INTRIGUING FEATURE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: JoWood
DEVELOPER: 4Head Studios
RELEASE: Summer
GENRE: RTS/RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (1-8 Online)

CONCEPT

Described as the 'medieval *Sims*', *The Guild 2* is actually more like an *Age Of Empires*-esque historical RTS with social aspects.

THE ART OF LOVE

It is essential to marry and have children in *The Guild 2* in order to have someone who can continue your dynasty and carry on your reputation (nefarious or otherwise). Going about it is one of the most entertaining things about the game – once you've chosen a suitable wench or cad with whom to share your valuable seed, there is a long and vaguely *Sims*-esque courtship process wherein you try to persuade him or her to marry you via various means, including bribery if you so wish. Once married, you have a second entry in your 'dynasty' – that is, a second playable character with which to manipulate the medieval world – and a valuable child-making resource.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ 4Head Studios is a small, German developer whose expertise lie in the medieval RTS area. Before *The Guild*, the studio created a similar title based on a famous German medieval family. The fanbase is largely German, but the firm has created a variety of *Tycoon*-esque games for US publishers.

HISTORY

■ **BIG BIZ TYCOON** 2003 [PC]
■ **THE GUILD** 2002 [PC]

"THE GUILD 2 IS A BREATHTAKINGLY DETAILED LIFE SIMULATION"
THE GUILD 2 PRODUCER, 4HEAD STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE GAMER'S GUILD

AGE OF EMPIRES x THE SIMS x BRIBERY = THE GUILD 2

■ Fighting may seem an easy option, but it can backfire, so send a henchman instead.

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

More war is on the menu as you take control of armies throughout one of the bloodiest and most brutal eras in history.

YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT, FOR YOUR KNIGHT…

When it comes to videogames, war has seen many forms. It's a subject that, for all its harshness, translates to game extremely well. Not only are the weapons, foes and locations already decided, but also our planet's colourful and violent history provides more than adequate material to make the countless titles based on these wars relatively unique every time. As true as it is to say that we're sick of storming the Normandy beaches, there's potential for a far wider selection – something that Creative Assembly is rather good at exploiting.

The *Total War* franchise is huge for this very reason. Working from era to era, famous battles and invasions featuring some of the most interesting and downright nasty civilisations that have ever lived have been recreated for our amusement. The three PC games prior to *Medieval II* have, so far, clocked up a hefty 3.5 million unit sales to date and have won a number of awards for what they have achieved – namely an accurate, involving way of fighting through the tough times that they are set within.

It's to be expected that the latest instalment in the series is aiming to emulate the success that the previous titles enjoyed. In order to achieve this, it seems that the barriers will be pushed even further and we'll be presented with an even deeper experience than ever before.

As the title suggests, you'll lead your forces through the troubling Medieval era once again, only this time it appears that our fair country's most turbulent period is going to look and play in a far more pleasant way. The one fact that stands out as you peruse the press release is that the title will allow 10,000 dynamic characters on the battlefield at any one time. We don't need to tell you that that's quite a large number and it's going to be impressive to see facts such as this in action. After all, the series has been running for a good seven years now; enough time to tweak areas and learn from mistakes made along the way – it's unlikely that impressive boasts such as this will prove to be anything other than true.



Where did the sergeant keep his armies?

"THIS TIME IT SEEMS THAT OUR FAIR COUNTRY'S MOST TURBULENT PERIOD IS GOING TO LOOK AND PLAY IN A FAR MORE PLEASANT WAY"

Some two hundred new units will feature throughout *Medieval II: Total War*, and Creative Assembly sources have already confirmed that there will be a far greater emphasis on siege weaponry and warfare – a trick that the last *Medieval* game missed out on – and that this will not buck the trend and once again outshine all of its forerunners. We'll have to wait a while to find out if all this is accurate, but we're sure it'll be worth it.

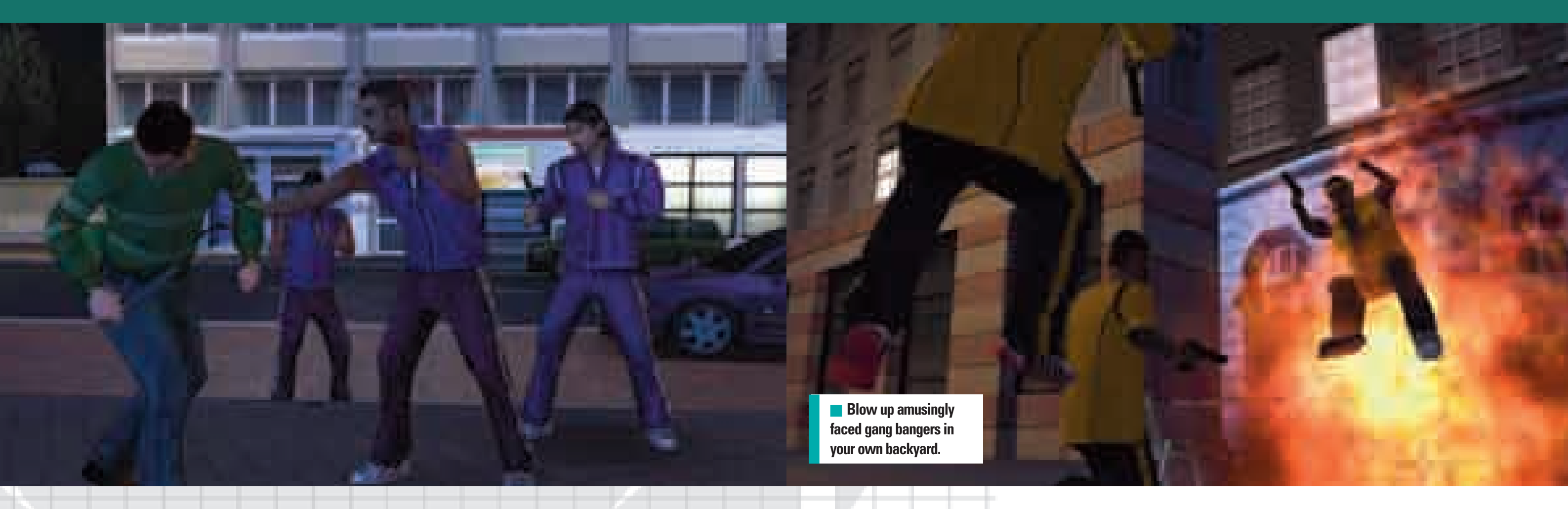


We reckon that by the time they get there, they really won't fancy a brawl.

"I don't know what I've been told…"


eMag

GANGS OF LONDON



■ Blow up amusingly faced gang bangers in your own backyard.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

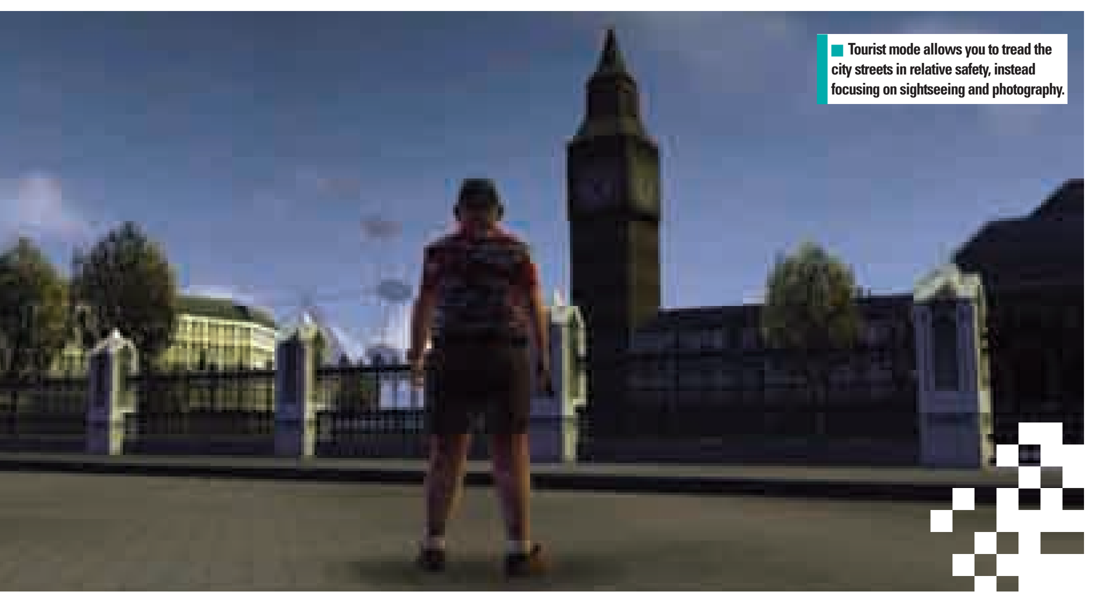
CONCEPT

■ The team behind the dubious *The Getaway* titles wages war on the capital with this varied mix of game styles.

I LIVE BY THE RIVER

games™ is bored. Bored of gangs, bored of violence, bored of driving around desolate city streets, bored of police chases and bored of trudging through the same old missions. Blame *GTA* – it's such an incredibly influential and important title (and undeniably fantastic) that every publisher wants to emulate it. Not Sony London. Not any more, at least. After two daytrip *Getaway*s around our nation's capital, the development house has decided to approach London from a different angle. About time too.

Gangs Of London is selling itself as a far more thoughtful affair than many might have expected. The game's core – unsurprisingly based around the concept of turf war and territory domination – is pitched as 'tactical urban combat', placing you in charge of one of London's five main crime outfits – Cockneys, Russians, Yardies, Triads or Pakistanis – and allowing you to 'hot-swap' between your gang members to outflank and outthink your opponents. Throw in vehicles and an impressive 60 missions, and we could be looking at a more in-depth version of *San Andreas*' turf wars. We could also be looking at a convoluted *The Getaway: Black Monday*. We sincerely hope it's not the latter.



■ Tourist mode allows you to tread the city streets in relative safety, instead focusing on sightseeing and photography.

Regardless, there's more to *Gangs Of London* than violent shoot-outs outside the Brixton Academy. For starters, Sony London has seen fit to include an entire turn-based strategy mode, innovatively titled Gang Battle, which is an interesting mixture of *Risk* and poker, and can be played by up to four people using the same PSP. It relies on blind tactical decisions: each player moves his or her 'troops' with no knowledge of how their opponent has acted, and the machine plays out the impending warfare.

Many developers would be more than satisfied to cram their game with two fully fledged modes of play, but *Gangs Of London* also features a full Taxi Driver mode – complete with The Knowledge (the famous London cabbie test) – along with Tourist mode (tour the city as an American with a camera), and a smattering of classic British pub games, including pool, darts and, amusingly, skittles.

The biggest fear for any game boasting so many features is that it may all be spread too thinly. The Jack of all trades is never superior to the master of one, but *Gangs Of London* is looking suitably promising, nevertheless.

"GANGS OF LONDON IS SELLING ITSELF AS A FAR MORE THOUGHTFUL AFFAIR THAN MANY MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED"


eMag

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS



"HAVING THE CHANCE TO NOW BRING GAMERS THE AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE IS AN OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO"

SCARFACE, PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FKING WITH THE BEST**

BALLS + BALLS x BALLS = SCARFACE

■ "Say hello to my little friend." Hello.

■ Looking cool. Looking real cool. Hoo-ha.

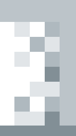


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Known for titles such as *The Simpsons: Hit & Run* and the better-than-we-thought-it-would-be *Hulk: Total Destruction*, Radical is certainly no stranger to open world games. It'll be interesting to see exactly how well *Scarface* turns out considering this experience.

HISTORY

■ CRASH TAG TEAM RACING 2005 [PS2]
■ THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN 2003 [MULTI]
■ DARK SUMMIT 2002 [XBOX]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Radical
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Tony Montana is alive and well. He doesn't have any money though. Cue *GTA*-style action as you climb your way back up to drug lord.

WHO PUT THIS TOGETHER? RADICAL, THAT'S WHO…

PS2 **There are few things more amusing than laughing at the mistakes of others.** The mistake in question this time is the original *Scarface* movie. In 1932, someone decided to make the film nowhere near as well as Brian De Palma did years later. It was amusing when we got a glimpse of it. Knowing of Pacino's convincing cocaine-fuelled rants and extremities goes someway to making the original *Bugsy Malone*-esque film seem a little weak. Still, it's unfair to judge. How were people to know that their rather lame attempt would inspire one of the most iconic movies ever?

Of course, some people aren't blessed with ignorance, and you have to be part of a brave development team if you want to take a movie that's so highly regarded and make a videogame out of it. More so if you plan to overhaul the most well-known scene, change the ending and have the main character walk away to continue his adventures rather than dying a grisly death. It's bold, but on the plus side, get it right and you've got yourself an audience that'll love you for a long, long while.

> "SCARFACE OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THE CHARACTER TONY MONTANA IS PERFECT FODDER FOR THE VIDEOGAME MILL"

We have to admit, when we first heard about Radical's *The World Is Yours* plans, we were sceptical. It sounded much like a *GTA* clone, and the E3 demo last year was hardly inspiring – things do change though…

In this case, what's changed is the time that's been given. Vivendi granted the studio a heap of 'bonus time' to dress the title up, and it's looking all the better for it. The game is now due out this Autumn – a year later than was planned – and the time seems to have been spent making the overall package more appealing. A peek at the title last year revealed a game that was looking a little grey (or 'Godfather' as Radical put it to us). Each environment is now brighter, lighter and generally nicer. In fact, after some time with the latest build, it became immediately apparent that *Scarface* or, more accurately, the character Tony Montana is perfect fodder for the videogame mill.

Using Tony's frankly hysterical movie put-downs as a taunt system and his tendency to snort a lot of coke and fly off the handle is a good excuse to give the game its own FPS Berserker ability. Also, as this is *Scarface*, there's a Balls meter that fills up whenever you do things worthy of the label 'ballsy' – we suppose it had to happen. There are plenty of nice touches, plenty of big names – including Ricky Gervais, Michael York and Cheech of Cheech & Chong fame – and talks with the team suggest that they are more than happy with the progress that's been made, and they are keen to point out that there will be further improvements over the remaining months before release.

Although the extra time and positive attitude may point toward good things, all the time in the world won't change the fact that consumers will stand *Scarface* up next to *Grand Theft Auto* and sneer at it a little. Undeserved, perhaps, but the similarities are there and that's the way the public seems to react when given these playthings. Hopefully, the following six months will provide yet more time for improvement so *Scarface: The World Is Yours* can reach a point where it may be judged on its own merits.

GOING DOWNTOWN

Aside from the Balls meter, there will also be other 'Ball' moments. For example, when shooting enemies, you aim – and get scored appropriately for – hitting the different parts of the body. For the most part it's the norm: head, arm, leg… It's only when you realise that you can target the left and right testicles individually that you remember that you're playing *Scarface* and, of course, you can shoot them in the balls. We can't wait to see how many other 'bally' moments they manage to squash in there.



■ We're guessing it must be a slow Tuesday at Club Massive. Maybe some drinks promotions should be considered.

FIELD COMMANDER



Explosions are fun. Rejoice, for there are lots of them in *Field Commander* – it's all a bit more violent than *Advance Wars*.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment
RELEASE: 19 May
GENRE: Turn-Based Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Sony Online Entertainment goes all *Advance Wars*, bringing us a multi-player-centred turn-based strategy for the PSP.

ADVANCE WARS WITHOUT THE CUTE?

The immediate and unfortunate comparison that *Field Commander* brings to mind is *Advance Wars*. Immediate, because they're both handheld, slightly futuristic, turn-based RPGs. Unfortunate, because few games could come out of that comparison well. Thankfully, though, *Field Commander* just about manages it. Although it lacks the immediacy of the brilliant touch-screen control in *Dual Strike*, it matches it in terms of accessibility and subtle complexity.

In *Field Commander*, you assume the role of an elite trainee in a Special Forces unit named ATLAS. Commanding air, ground and sea units, you attain victory either by capturing an opponent's HQ or by destroying all of their units in the customary manner. Other officers from ATLAS will help you along the way, offering advice and training throughout the game. Stylistically, the game is distinctly futuristic – the interface is designed to look like a space-age computer and the units themselves are more than a little bit '*Halo*' in appearance. It suits the PSP, though, just as *Advance Wars'* cutesy Manga style suits the DS.

When units encounter each other, the fight animations are particularly impressive – the whole game is rendered in proper 3D, making units and terrain sufficiently distinct. Mountain landscapes actually look mountainous, forests have proper trees, and the maps retain a good sense of realism. The game actually feels more like *Command & Conquer* than *Advance Wars* despite the fact that the two handheld titles are all but identical in terms of control. You cannot select multiple units, but as *Field Commander* is a turn-based game as opposed to real-time it doesn't affect the flow of the action.

The emphasis in *Field Commander* is upon retaining individual units rather than overpowering the enemy with hordes of ground troops. All the units are hardy and have their own particular specialties, and most will even withstand four or five turns' worth of normal fire before succumbing. Consequently, every unit feels significant on the field, making tactical manoeuvres feel that little bit more substantial.

The PSP needs a strategy game that works, and it's looking like *Field Commander* might just fit the bill. It's rather strange to see Sony Online Entertainment turning its hand to such a title, but what we've seen of it so far is promising. It feels somewhat slow at the moment, but we're pretty confident that the game will be a little more streamlined come its release. Sony's handheld is gathering strength month-on-month at an impressive rate; hopefully its power will be apparent at retail next to the DS.

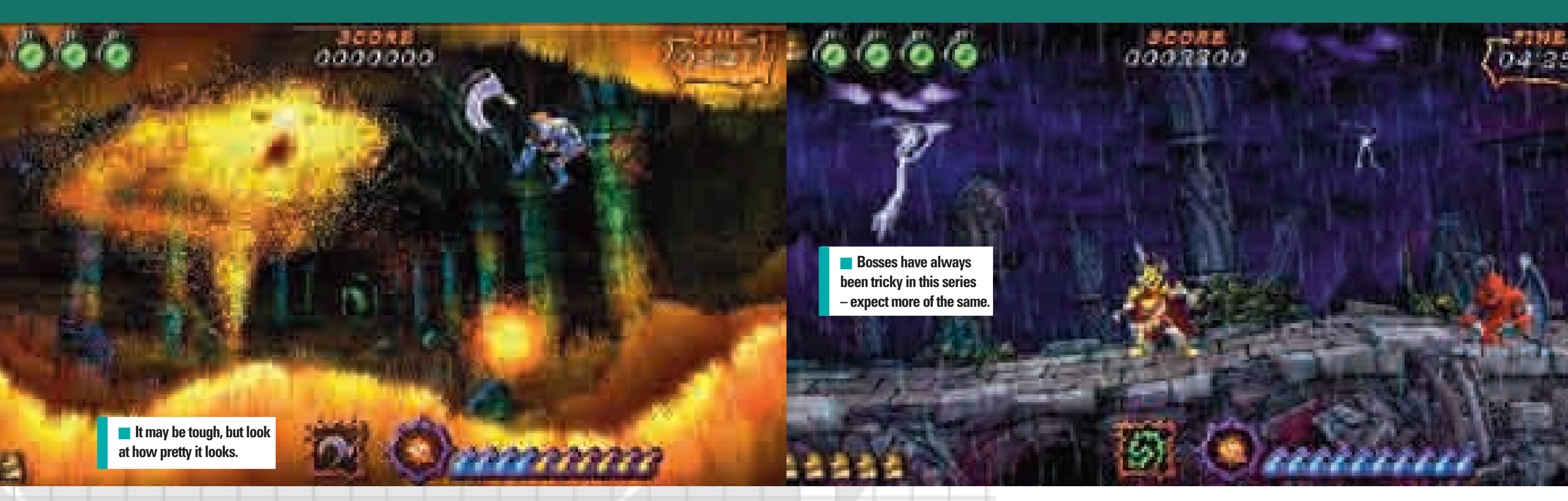


The top-down view is easy to get along with, and different buildings are sufficiently distinguishable.

"EVERY UNIT FEELS SIGNIFICANT ON THE FIELD, MAKING TACTICAL MANOEUVRES FEEL MUCH MORE SUBSTANTIAL"


eMag

EXTREME GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS



It may be tough, but look at how pretty it looks.

Bosses have always been tricky in this series – expect more of the same.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1

COMMENT

Arthur heads out to face the forces of evil, once again, in an effort to save the lovely princess from lots of things that aren't quite so lovely.

AT LAST, A REAL KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOUR

Plenty of people have complained about the difficulty of Capcom's titles. To be fair, in most cases, they're well within their rights to grumble. Over the past couple of years we've seen games such as *killer7* and *Viewtiful Joe* frustrate gamers to their very limits, and if you were to scour the second-hand basket at your local videogames store, you'd undoubtedly stumble across a fair number of these titles in near mint condition and often only played as far as the first boss.

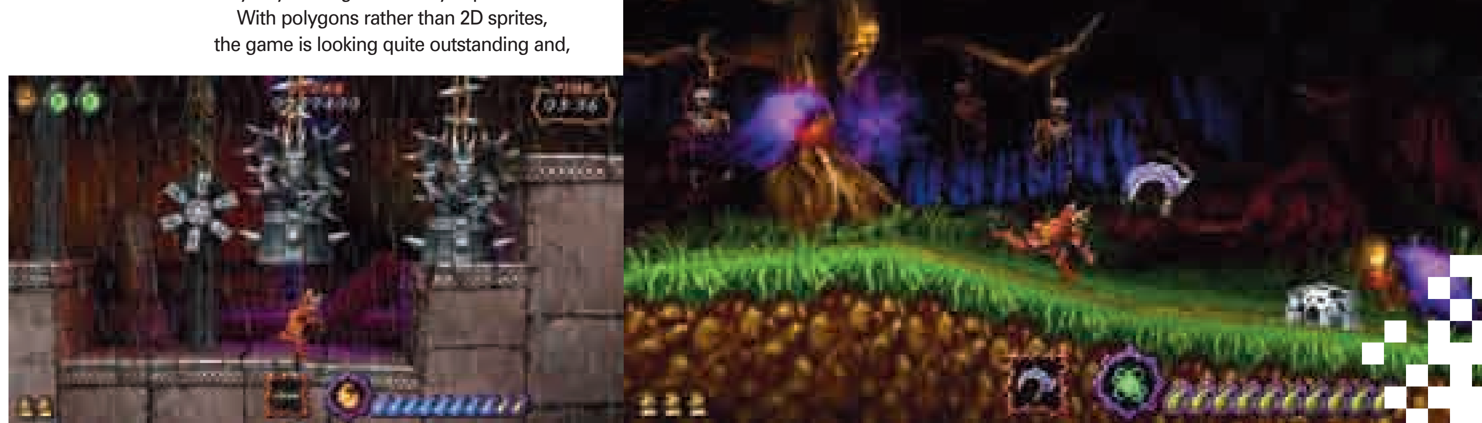
Tough as they were, if weighed up next to Capcom's *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*/*Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* series they would emerge lacking and are likely to be dubbed as 'easy'. A difficult game that knew no forgiveness and – upon completion – made you redo the whole thing again with a different weapon before it would allow you to view the credits; *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* is now on its way to your fragile and very expensive PSP.

With polygons rather than 2D sprites, the game is looking quite outstanding and, although the side-scrolling experience will be very similar, there will now be branching paths spread throughout the five stages, offering a little variety.

It's reckoned that this will be a far friendlier affair with your armour being able to withstand more than the one hit before you're left to fight in your red-spotted boxer shorts. A lost life will see you start at the exact position that you met your death rather than sending you back to the beginning of the stage. Though anyone who knows the games will vouch for the fact that although this may be friendlier it's still not going to be easy. You can be sure that there will be wizards waiting to turn you into a baby/old man/duck at every turn, and annoying sections involving things like floating on tiny rafts will occur frequently.

Whatever the case, however, although announced in Japan, we'll have to see if it's deemed worthy of our shores. We're guessing it may well make it to the UK toward the end of the year, so start getting some practice in – you're probably going to need it.

"ANYONE WHO KNOWS THE GAMES WILL VOUCH FOR THE FACT THAT, ALTHOUGH THIS MAY BE FRIENDLIER, IT'S STILL NOT GOING TO BE EASY"



Just imagine how many times you're going to die. Lots, we'd wager.


eMag

GOTHIC 3



Start sharpening your sword on the grindstone over there and that orc will get a bit agitated. He's right clever.

"CAN I SET SOMETHING OR SOMEONE ON FIRE?"

The most mainstream comparison to the *Gothic* games is Lionhead Studios' *Fable*. The *Gothic* series, however, not only predates that game by a number of years, it carries off its vision of an absorbing and evolving game world better than *Fable* ever did. The series has developed a cult following, and consequently Piranha Bytes now has the luxury of creating the *Gothic* world as it had always imagined – bigger, better and much more beautiful.

Where the first two games took place on the island of Khorinis, in *Gothic 3* the player will venture to the mainland continent of Myrtana, a bigger, more varied environment. It's your staple fantasy game – cold, mountainous north; barren, desert south; and verdant, foresty central areas all feature – but the main change that the mainland locale brings is the number and variety of animals and communities that live on it. The scope of this game is enormous, and from atop a mountain, everthing that you can see you can visit.

Although the Orcs from the last games enslaved much of the human race of Myrtana, many tribes and rebels found homes in the mountains and valleys. So in addition to the human races, there are many affiliations too – it's up to the player whether to play by the rules of the Orcs or join a rebel faction in order to achieve their goals.

The focus, as it has always been in the *Gothic* series, is upon absorbing the player in a living, breathing world, a world in which actions have consequences and choice is a key element in proceedings. The world of the *Gothic* games is, indeed, one of the most cohesive we've ever seen, but *Gothic 3* takes it to a whole new level – villages built on the side of a mountain don't look like they've been specifically modelled, textured and placed in the game, but rather look like they could have been built by the races that inhabit them in the game world.

Everything in *Gothic 3* looks like it could have naturally occurred in the *Gothic* universe and not placed in as an element of the game's level design. Each texture and model in the game has been created by hand, meaning that the attention to detail on the villages and their inhabitants is quite impressive; it looks startlingly authentic, and *Gothic* fans will be exceptionally happy with the game universe's fidelity and detail.

Of course, what has so far impaired the *Gothic* series' desired level of immersion, has been the games' control systems. The combat especially – involving holding down a key and using the arrow buttons for different sword strokes – was so complex that many players just bypassed it altogether in order to use spells. *Gothic 3* feels much, much more fluid, using the mouse for sword battles in a vaguely *Guild Wars* style and incorporating varied styles of combat including axe and double-sword skills. In fact, the game's look reminds us of *Guild Wars*, although the level of interactivity surpasses NCSoft's MMO.

Really, the only worries that we have for *Gothic 3* are to do with localisation – the previous games suffered very specific problems, but with the third game in the series receiving somewhat more attention following the success of its predecessors, we hope that such issues won't affect it. With more fluid controls, a much bigger world and an awful lot more options to play with, we can see *Gothic 3* making a big impression when it's released later this year – certainly, anyone who played and enjoyed the previous entries in the series has much to look forward to in the final instalment.

"THE FOCUS IS UPON ABSORBING THE PLAYER IN A LIVING, BREATHING WORLD"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: JoWood
DEVELOPER: Piranha Bytes
RELEASE: September
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Following the previous *Gothic* games, the main character now sets out for the mainland in an even more absorbing, reactive game world.

COME AND PLAY

Everything in *Gothic 3* is supposed to be authentic, and therefore all of it can be interacted with. Anything that you see an NPC interacting with you can use as well. Beyond the entertainment value, certain items provide definite benefits: using a stick to roast meat over a fire with other characters, for instance, increases the food's health-replenishing properties, and sharpening swords increases their lifespan. Such consistency adds to the believability of *Gothic 3*, but manages not to make things overly complex; in keeping with the series, there won't be an enormous amount of stats to improve and numbers to sift through as there are in so many fantasy RPGs.

GOTHIC 3
PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Piranha Bytes works out of Germany, and was founded by ex-members of Greenwood Entertainment Software in 1997. A small development company, Piranha Bytes has so far put all of its energy into the *Gothic* series, of which *Gothic 3* will be the final instalment.

HISTORY

- **GOTHIC 2** 2003 [PC]
- **GOTHIC** 2001 [PC]

"THE WORLD OF THE GOTHIC GAMES IS ONE OF THE MOST COHESIVE WE'VE EVER SEEN, BUT GOTHIC 3 REALLY TAKES IT TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL"

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE BATS! THE BATS!

FABLE x BROKEN PROMISES x ORCS = GOTHIC 3

Orcs have enslaved the human race! That can't be good!

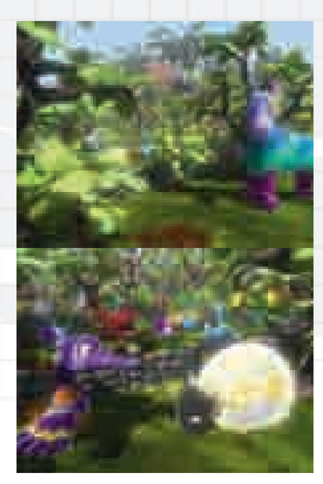
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

VIVA PIÑATA

SURE TO BE A HIT

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: UK
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Rare
Genre: Strategy
Players: TBA



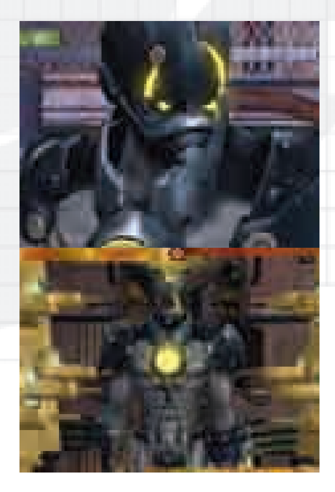
You have to ask yourself the question: what exactly is developer Rare up to? Later on this year, *Viva Piñata* should have descended upon us, and it's all starting to look a little bit strange. Being that its launch will now coincide with an animated television show, we're guessing that this is going to be something of a childish affair but, thanks to the spattering of screens that are available on it, we think we're going to have a soft spot for it anyway. Basically, this is about creating a lush garden that's pretty enough to lure in the wild piñata creatures. There are 60 in total and you will probably have to 'catch them all'. It all looks so adorable. Bless you, Rare.

RELEASE: TBA

BOMBERMAN: ACT ZERO

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: UK
Publisher: Hudson
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: TBA



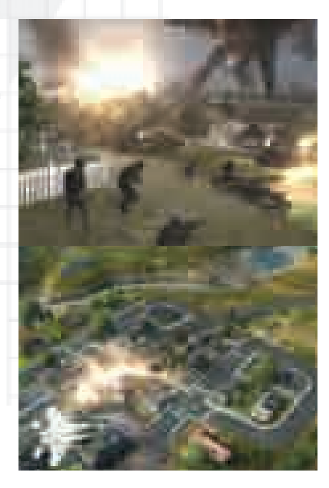
We can't help but notice that this isn't quite the *Bomberman* videogame we're used to. We were anticipating that a next-generation version would materialise, but we weren't expecting one that looks like this. Quite why Hudson has decided to change one of the most recognised and successful formulas in gaming history is a complete mystery to us, however, we do know that this game will have to be particularly good in order to avoid mockery. We absolutely love *Bomberman* titles, and if this cybernetic monstrosity and its needless first-person shooter action ruins it for us, then we're not going to be too pleased. It might be very good though – you never can tell…

RELEASE: TBA

WORLD IN CONFLICT

AN RTS WITH A TWIST

Format: PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Massive Entertainment
Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Players: 1-8



Real-time strategy titles are plentiful, but it's rare for a company to not only aim to reinvent the genre, but 'effectively create a sub-genre that allows people to flex their strategic thinking against more people than ever before'. This is apparently what *World In Conflict* is attempting to do, and this will be a real-time strategy game with no base building, no resource watching, but plenty of action. At present, Vivendi isn't talking about the single-player campaign, but the multi-player games will see two teams of four choosing specific roles and then setting about destroying rivals. Sounds interesting; we look forward to seeing the playable demos.

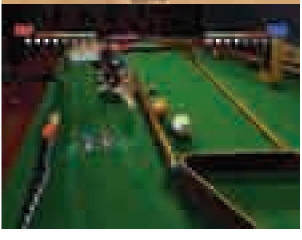
RELEASE: TBA

MICRO MACHINES V4

BRING ON THE TABLETOP…

Format: PS2, PSP, DS, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Supersonic Software
Genre: Racing
Players: TBA

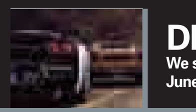






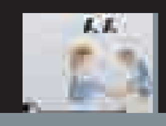
Throughout the Nineties, there was only one party game that you wanted to be playing – *Micro Machines*. Somehow the itty bitty cars, boats and helicopters, the novelty tracks and the quirky gameplay made for one of the finest racing experiences. And now it's coming to the PSP. It's an obvious choice for Sony's handheld, and Supersonic is hoping to bring all that made the original great along for the ride and expand the title suitably to give some new experiences – such as venturing beyond the house and back garden and heading into the sewers and supermarket. It's likely to be good – very good.

RELEASE: Q3 '06



DELAYED – Test Drive Unlimited [Multi]

We should all be playing this by now but, due to Atari pushing it back to June, you're just going to have to wait that little bit longer…



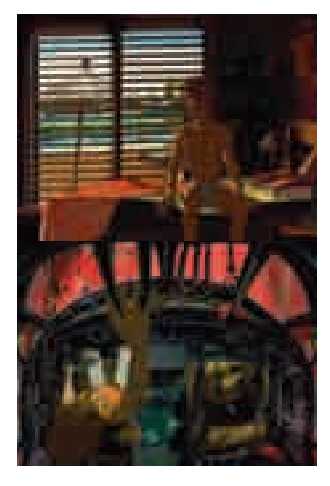
DELAYED – Wario Ware Twisted! [GBA]

It's been out in Japan for over a year now, but there's still no sign of it here in the UK. We crave the twisty mini-game goodness. Bring it.

RUNAWAY 2: THE DREAM OF THE TURTLE

ALL DAY I DREAM ABOUT…

Format:	PC
Origin:	France
Publisher:	Ascaron
Developer:	Pendulo Studios
Genre:	Point-N-Click
Players:	1



You like point-n-click adventures, right? Well if so, this game could be just what you need to keep you chirpy until the next *Sam & Max* title arrives. Despite being fairly successful throughout Europe, the first *Runaway* game – *A Road Adventure* – never actually made it over here to the UK, which is a shame, but we have been assured that this latest instalment will definitely arrive on our shores because Ascaron has volunteered to take up the role of distributor. Quirky humour and a classic cartoon style are available in *Runaway 2*, and from what we've seen so far, it could be exactly what we need to cure our thirst for pointy, clicky puzzlers.

RELEASE: TBA

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 3: MUTANT NIGHTMARE

ER… COWABUNGA, DUDES?

Format:	PS2, Xbox, GC, DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Action-Adventure
Players:	1-4



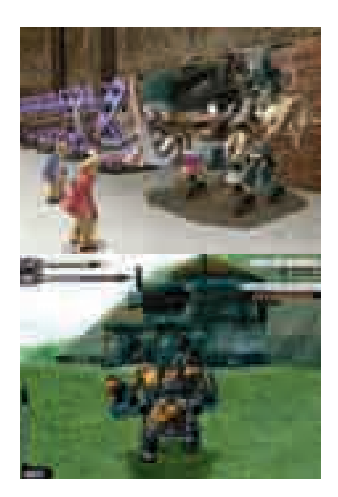
It's amazing how recent videogames based around The Turtles have managed to offend us. To be honest, the fact that the game would force us to revisit a carefree time somewhere around the mid-Eighties meant that, as long as it was playable we'd reap some sort of fun from the title. Somehow, though, developers still seem to fall at this rather low hurdle, and we can only hope that *Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare* delivers on its promises. It appears that four players will be able to 'unleash shell' at once and there will also be an arcade-perfect version of *Turtles In Time* included in the package. We're still not convinced though.

RELEASE: APRIL

STEAMBOT CHRONICLES

LET'S WALK OUT

Format:	PS2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Atlus
Developer:	Irem
Genre:	Action RPG
Players:	1-2



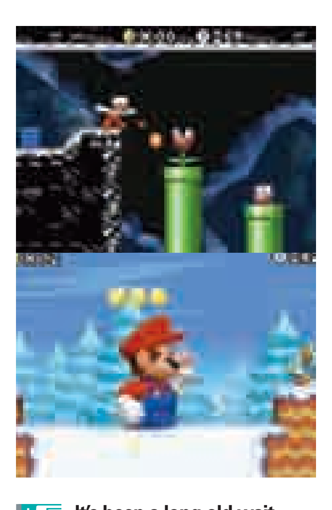
Quite unexpectedly, today dancing cars aren't really that much of a rarity thanks to that ingenious but oh-so annoying Citroen advertisement. Usually, the opportunity to join a 'trotmobile' band and strut your stuff – as is possible in Atlus' *Steambot Chronicles* – would be regarded as something of a special occasion. This is an action-RPG-adventure game that takes place in a time where vehicles are no longer restricted to just the roads – heaven forbid – but can actually wander around freely living their own lives. With a sandbox-style of gameplay and such a bizarre setting, *Steambot Chronicles* is certainly something to keep an eye out for in the coming months.

RELEASE: Q2 '06

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

DOING WHAT HE DOES BEST

Format:	DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Platformer
Players:	1-2



It's been a long old wait, but at last we're getting a *Mario* game that's worth sitting up and paying attention to. We're completely fed up with sport title cash-ins and the ever-increasing *Mario Party* games, and so the fact that this new Nintendo DS title is heading back to the little plumber's Italian roots is a rather refreshing revelation. This new title is a classic side-scroller with wall jumps, triple jumps, mushrooms and pretty much everything that we have grown so fond of over the years. Obviously, being on the DS we can assume that there will be a generous splash of innovation; it's already been said that there'll be some new size-based abilities. Roll on summer, we say.

RELEASE: Q2 '06


1P
600



This is what happens when tasty pineapples go bad. **Pop 'N' Twinbee, SNES [Konami] 1993**

25,808

live style choice

BOOSTED GAME SALES, PLAYERS ONLINE 100 HOURS PER WEEK, POWER STRUGGLES ON GLOBAL LEADERBOARDS… HAS MICROSOFT MANAGED TO SPAWN A NEW GAMING ELITE?

Achievement Unlocked. Two words that have thus far defined the next gen of online gaming on Xbox 360. A small, green circle of light that appears on the bottom of your screen heralding those words tells you that you've just reached one of the in-game milestones set by the developers, and been awarded a set amount of points for it. These gamer points are then tallied up and displayed on Xbox Live for everyone to see. Friends, foes or random strangers, anyone can check your online gamer tag and see how you've been putting your Xbox 360 time to use. Collect 100 frags in *Quake 4*, complete Survival in *Dead Or Alive 4*, simply persist until the end credits in *King Kong*, all are examples of how you can get those two words to appear, and hear the quiet popping sound accompanying it. The more points you hold, the more virtual bragging rights you have.

Inevitably, this feature has been taken to extremes by the competitive mindset, and seen a global race for who can garner the most gamer points the fastest. Xbox Live on 360 has taken completist gaming to its logical extreme and this wave of competition has been led by players with the willingness and sheer endurance to plough through achievements. Colin Jennison (Crono117), Jamal Nickens (zophar321), William Haley (Fall3n Angelz), Nick Keenan (Nick528), Nick 'Reboticon' (TheGrayWolf) and Gary Dudley (StripClubDj) are among the names in the top ten spearheading the new gaming elite.

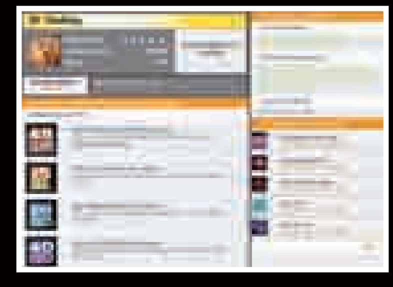
BRAGGING RIGHTS

As the hardware evolved, games shifted from being led by skill and high scores to being led by story and cut-scenes. Famous website Twin Galaxies held the fort during this shift, cataloguing and recording high scores sent in for retro games by video, while the likes of *Final Fantasy* and *Metal Gear Solid* shifted focus onto plots.

Now, Xbox 360 is bringing competition back in a big way. Xbox Live's gamer score system is the first next-gen move to bring the competitive mentality of high scores and gaming milestones back to the forefront of gaming, and its obligatory inclusion in every game means that even story-led titles such as *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *Condemned: Criminal Origins* now have a competitive element attached to them. "Believe me, showing off, and competitiveness existed back in the day," explains Jamal Nickens. "The only difference now is that it's not just with your friends or players in the arcade. Gamer score is what all true gamers have been waiting for."

French-Canadian player ST TheKing is the global Xbox Live leader and has been sitting pretty at the top since the turn of the year. He was the first to crack the 20,000 points barrier and also has some of the notoriously tough achievements under his belt, such as No Crash Victory in *Ridge Racer 6*. English isn't his first language, so he's developed a reputation online for being quiet and retiring. If anything, this has enhanced his aura as a maverick gamer, especially among the top players themselves. "He never talks more than necessary, which sort of adds some mystery about him," admits Colin Jennison. Yet ST TheKing's newfound celebrity highlights the impact that Xbox Live is having on gaming.

Previously, to become a gaming celebrity, you had to travel the world and excel in niche competitive genres such as first-person shooters on PC (Fatal1ty, Voo) or 2D beat-'em-ups in arcades (Daigo, Justin Wong). Now you can become a known gaming name simply by being one of the select few to have beaten *Call Of Duty 2* on Veteran or reached 1,000 headshots on *Perfect Dark Zero*. You don't even have to leave your sofa to establish your claim as



■ His Royal Highness, ST TheKing is well ahead of the Live pack.



The Players

GAMER TAG: Crono117

REAL NAME: Colin Jennison
AGE: 21
LOCATION: Toronto, Canada
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 22,183
INFORMATION: "Currently a part-time student at the university of Toronto, I live with my girlfriend in a one-bedroom apartment. I spend much of my free time playing videogames, but as a part-time job I play in a rock cover band ww.lucky13band.com) and also have my own website with pictures and some songs I have written in the past (www.colejennison.com)."

GLOBAL RANKING: 5

The Players

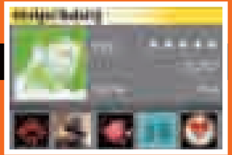
GAMER TAG: TheGrayWolf

REAL NAME: Nick 'Reboticon'
AGE: 23
LOCATION: Knoxville, Texas
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 23,493
INFORMATION: "I'm 23 years old. I have been playing videogames since I was three and have always been above average at them. I own my own business, which gives me lots of time to play games. My most satisfying achievement would have to be completing Dark Agent in *Perfect Dark Zero*. It was only worth 50 points, but I respect anyone who has that done."

GLOBAL RANKING: 2



The Players



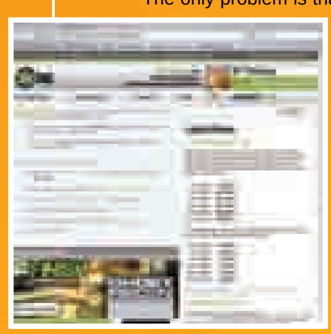
GAMER TAG: StripClubDj

REAL NAME: Gary Dudley
AGE: 34
LOCATION: Citrus Heights, California
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 21,267
INFORMATION: "My name is Gary. I am a 34 year-old DJ. I've loved video games since I was a little kid. I was born in Texas and moved to California about 20 years ago. I've been a strip club DJ for ten years. It's great money and gives me lots of time to play games, I think that is why I keep it."

GLOBAL RANKING: 9

MYSPACE

With gamerpoints gradually clawing their way into the Xbox 360's gaming culture, certain websites have started popping up with their own leaderboard spin on the statistics that gamer scores provide. This is proving far more interesting than the barebones number game Xbox.com provides. The way it works in the case of leading website Top360Tags.com is that the site itself is developed with Microsoft. NET 2.0 Framework, which talks to a SQL Server 2005 database, and can check gamer tags against Microsoft's own Xbox Live servers. The only problem is that users have to enter an active gamer tag on the site in order for it to 'activate'. This is the main problem with such sites. Top360Tag.com has managed to secure 170,000 gamer tags, mainly thanks to a competition it ran awarding prizes to whoever managed to enter the most, but this is still only seeing part of the picture.





Perhaps the gamering of gamerpoints is inspired by *Call Of Duty 2*. Is it a calling or duty?

one of the better gamers around. That, if nothing else, is why Xbox Live is drawing a new era of competitive players into the fold.

STICKS AND STONES

If the charge for top gamer scores was inevitable as soon as the Xbox 360 Live floodgates were thrown open, so too was the backlash from those lower down on the leaderboards. The top scorers have been accused of being social hermits, doing nothing with their lives but clock up more and more gamer points while everyone else finds playing time restricted by real-life issues – jobs, partners and money. "I get a lot of messages and friend requests every day," says Jennison, whose current top ten position makes him one of the biggest targets for hate messages. "About a quarter are friend requests and congratulations, half are questions for help, the rest are people accusing me of cheating, telling me I have no life, I am a fat nerd and so on."

All of the players in the top ten we spoke to admit to spending somewhere in the region of 20 to 80 hours per week on Xbox Live just to pad their gamer score and keep within touching distance of ST TheKing. So is there any truth in the claims that the top Xbox Live gamers have access to resources such as time and money that most of us simply don't have? "Yes and no," says William Haley. "ST TheKing and I definitely have more time than most people, and money can become a factor too, although we mostly rent our games because we can tear through most of them in a week, tops. But there is plenty of skill that goes into it as well. I just pick things up faster and get achievements done more quickly. Even if they had time, the majority of people aren't good at everything."

As always, the truth is somewhere in between. While some of the gamers in the top ten are unemployed or part-time students, others are working full time with live-in partners. In their broad estimation of how long they spent playing on their Xbox 360 a week, not a single player in the top ten gave a bottom figure lower than 20 hours a week. Michael Rutter admits to spending over 100 hours a week on his Xbox 360. "If it was a burden, I would just stop playing," he says dismissively of his gamer points pursuit. "I'm still having fun." This would be perfect ammo for wanting to claim that being top is all about time, but the catch here is Rutter's not even in the top ten anymore. He tumbled out of it in late February and thus far, has been unsuccessful in his attempts to rejoin the fray.

So why have Xbox 360 achievements caught on in the way they have? Along with competition, the dominant factor in the success of gamer score has been the sense of accomplishment and community. Original Xbox Live allowed you a Friends List and let you see what your friends were playing, primarily to make setting up matches easier. Now, you can instantly call up what your friends are playing, what they're currently doing in the game and, most importantly, what in-game milestones they've achieved.

Cross-checking your friend's achievements with your own has become commonplace and while asking for advice or congratulating players for reaching certain achievements is one thing, being the player asked or congratulated is quite another. "In the past, you could spend days or even months on a game and when it was over, you had nothing to show for it," says Haley. "Now you can keep those accomplishments with you forever, and people from the Live community can get together about how you did this or that. You can even do some together. Microsoft says it's the HD era but I think it's the Live era."

THE COMPETITION

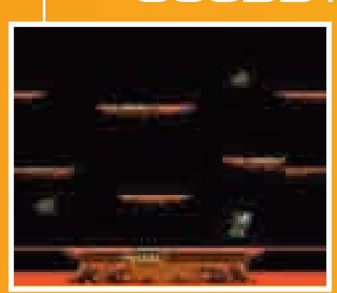
Xbox Live has grown so important that Sony can no longer afford to ignore it. Whether it was arrogance, design limitations or a rare mis-step by Sony, online gaming via

OLD FASHIONED



With Xbox Live gamer scores heralding a new era in competitive gaming, it's fallen down to two organisations to try and keep the flame burning for the FPS and beat-'em-up genres in offline tournaments. Major League Gaming (www.mlgpro.com) is currently the biggest organisation for tournament gaming, offering games from *Halo 2* to *Super Smash Bros. Melee* across America. Meanwhile, the US is also home to Evolution (www.evo2k.com), the annual tournament that sees the world's best beat-'em-up players gather under one roof for three nights of *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter*, *Soul Calibur* and *Street Fighter* action. This tournament is particularly attractive for Japanese players, who excel in the numerous arcades on their hometurf but can't compete for money under Japan's gambling laws. Evo has recently teamed up with Major League Gaming, a sign of the times of what offline tournaments are having to do to survive. It remains to be seen whether the influence of Xbox Live on 360 inspires or draws away players from the offline tournament scenes.

WAVE GOODBYE



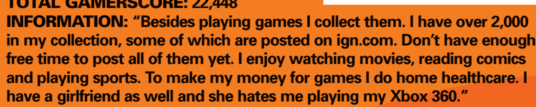
While a select few have been able to brag about getting 1,000 headshots in *Perfect Dark Zero* or completing the no-gamerpoints-at-all grind of *Quake 2*, there are still a few achievements that no one has been able to crack yet. They can all be found on Xbox Live Arcade – no *Hardwood Hearts* player has managed to secure the Prankster achievement, which is securing a total of 500 tricks. Persistence will presumably see this achievement fall, which can't be said for the remaining two – reaching Wave 100 in both *Joust* and *Robotron: 2048*. The Joust achievement seems particularly harsh. Only eight Xbox Live players have managed to scramble their way to the achievement awarded for reaching Wave 30, so Wave 100 is out of the question… surely? You can bet the kudos for being the first player to crack Wave 100 will definitely keep hands glued to Xbox 360 pads, at least until an easier 'has never been done' achievement appears.

21,829

22,478

27,425

The Players

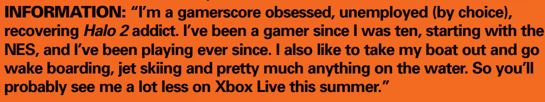


GAMER TAG: zophar321

REAL NAME: Jamal Nickens
AGE: 28
LOCATION: Macedonia, Ohio
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 22,448
INFORMATION: "Besides playing games I collect them. I have over 2,000 in my collection, some of which are posted on ign.com. Don't have enough free time to post all of them yet. I enjoy watching movies, reading comics and playing sports. To make my money for games I do home healthcare. I have a girlfriend as well and she hates me playing my Xbox 360."

GLOBAL RANKING: 3

The Players



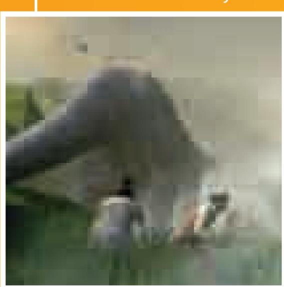
GAMER TAG: Nick528

REAL NAME: Nick Keenan
AGE: 24
LOCATION: Bothell, Washington
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 21,829
INFORMATION: "I'm a gamerscore obsessed, unemployed (by choice), recovering *Halo 2* addict. I've been a gamer since I was ten, starting with the NES, and I've been playing ever since. I also like to take my boat out and go wake boarding, jet skiing and pretty much anything on the water. So you'll probably see me a lot less on Xbox Live this summer."

GLOBAL RANKING: 6

HARD SELL

Xbox Live on 360 has sparked the competitive sales, but it's also indirectly fuelled something else. *Peter Jackson's King Kong* and *Madden NFL '06* might not have been the first games on the Xbox 360 early adopter's wish list, but their easy achievements quickly swung the gamer score wars for those looking for an early lead. As the most consistent challenger to ST TheKing's score since the start of the year, Nick Reboticon believes achievements *can* affect sales. "Honestly, I haven't found a game I loathe yet," he explains when asked if he'd play a 'bad' game for achievement points. "They all have something good about them. But to answer directly, yes, I would. I know a lot of UK players who played *Madden* only for the points."



Kolby Kappes of Top360Tag.com offers a different view. "It's definitely got the games played a lot more, but I think publishers of 'bad' games that have easy achievements are going to see their sales hurt in the future. The increasing use of game rental services means that people don't need to invest a full price in a game."

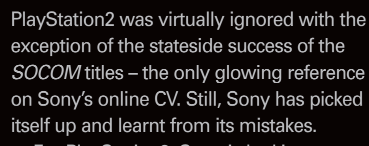
The Players

GAMER TAG: Fall3n Angelz

REAL NAME: William Haley
AGE: 24
LOCATION: Hollywood, California
TOTAL GAMERSCORE: 21,425
INFORMATION: "I've played games since the C64. I've had every system ever (even Virtual Boy). I'm also a comic book writer. I got into comics because if you make a successful comic book, you may get to turn it into a movie. And of course, if you make a movie, EA will swoop in and make a crappy game out of it. It's my sideways way of getting into the industry."



GLOBAL RANKING: 8

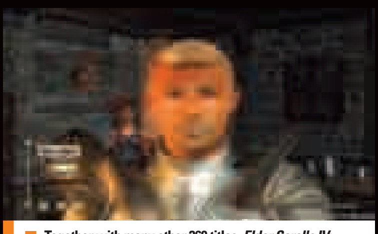


PlayStation2 was virtually ignored with the exception of the stateside success of the *SOCOM* titles – the only glowing reference on Sony's online CV. Still, Sony has picked itself up and learnt from its mistakes.

For PlayStation3, Sony is looking to clamber on top of the online console gaming monster that Microsoft has created. Going by the working title of PlayStation Network Platform, Sony's online platform will be ready from PlayStation3's launch and seems to openly copy most of Xbox Live's infrastructure. Sony is promising voice chat, messaging, matchmaking, rankings and downloads with micro payments all accessed with a single log-in ID.

Sound familiar? One key difference is that Sony will allow licensees to connect their own game servers to the network, which leads to the biggest strength of Sony's touted online service – it's free. Surprisingly, no achievements or gamer score features have been announced yet. However, Haley believes it would be foolish to do so. "I am somewhat sceptical Sony will have an achievement-type system, which will put it at a disadvantage when a player like me would rather gain gamer score from a multi-platform game like *Stranglehold* than play a slightly prettier version and get no gamer score. Seeing how much people are getting into achievements, I won't be the only one sticking to 360 versions..."

Still, Microsoft has the knowledge and early lead in the console online wars, which will advise it on how to hold onto that lead. Besides the obvious competitive nature of gamer points, there's an interesting flipside that should also be considered – the various statistics also provide a fairly clear snapshot of Xbox Live's 360 gamers at any given moment. Again, this should also tell Microsoft what it's doing right and wrong. Various websites have started appearing that are doing far more with the data sent while playing Xbox Live than Microsoft's Xbox.com is currently bothering with.



Together with many other 360 titles, *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is now synonymous with competitive gaming.

While there are obvious inaccuracies to be considered, mostly to do with the subscription-based nature of these websites and the language barrier, closer examination of the upper echelons of the Xbox Live gamer score leaderboard reveals no Japanese players troubling the high scores. In fact, according to MyGamerCard.net, the highest-ranking Japanese player is kensashimasho who currently lingers outside the top 1,000. Worrying for Microsoft? The statistics might not be as damning as they first appear. "It's pretty simple," explains Top360Tag's Kolby Kappes. "The Japanese don't have enough games to be in the top group. The total achievement score possible for Japanese gamers is less than half of what's available to US and UK gamers. On titles that are popular in Japan, you see some domination. Look at the top scores on *Dead Or Alive 4* and you'll see it's awash with Japanese gamers at the top."

LIVE WIRE

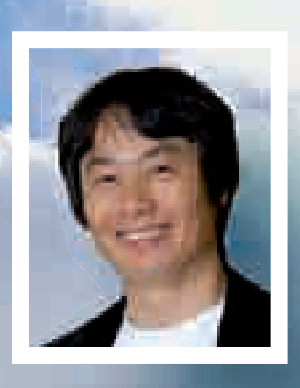
Kappes proves an interesting person to talk to. As the head of Top360Tag.com, he oversees 190,000 gamer tags with the number growing every day as it slowly takes MyGamerCard.net's place as the main source for leaderboards and statistics. As such, he's better placed than most to see the trends on Xbox Live and even he admits to being surprised by the success of Xbox Live Arcade, Microsoft's service that allows gamers to download smaller titles for a fee.

"Xbox Live Arcade is a force," Kolby says. "We've read circumstantial evidence of this, but we're really seeing it in our statistics. Over 40 per cent of the gamers that we're tracking have bought at least one Xbox Live Arcade game and played it enough to get some achievements." While Microsoft proves elusive on the total number of gamers currently on Live, offering only vague statistics, Kolby pins it down to a workable range. "We've heard a rumour that there were about two million people on Xbox 360 so far. About half of those are on Xbox Live."

Even with the million gamers currently propping up Xbox Live, it's unlikely that the names adorning the top of the leaderboards are going to change unless some of the current faces drop out. The only way to compete in this race would have been to hit the ground running since launch day; latecomers are simply going to have to get their competitive scratch itched on individual leaderboards found in each game rather than the overall Xbox 360 leaderboard. But for Colin, Jamal, William, Nick and Gary, the race to overthrow ST TheKing and become known as Xbox Live's best overall gamer continues. "When people look back on the 21st Century and they think what was the most addictive drug, it's not going to be crack or pre-reduction Lindsay Lohan music videos," says Haley. "It's going to be that little feeling you get when you hear the popping noise and Achievement Unlocked appears on your screen…"

All gamerscores and global rankings were correct at the time of going to press.

Hello Miyamoto



TIME MAGAZINE HAS CALLED HIM, "THE SPIELBERG OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY." HE IS THE BRAIN BEHIND THE MARIO, ZELDA, PIKMIN AND DONKEY KONG GAMES, AND HE IS ALSO SAID TO BE PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR 13 PER CENT OF NINTENDO'S TOTAL GAME SALES. THE GR EAT SHIGERU MIYAMOTO PULLS UP A CHAIR WITH GAMES™ AND TELLS US HOW IT'S DONE…





PROFILE / SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

Born in 1952, in Sonobe town near Kyoto, Shigeru Miyamoto enjoyed an idyllic, rural upbringing. As a child he displayed a keen sense of adventure, often losing himself for hours in the caves, lakes and canyons that surrounded his home. In 1970 he enrolled in the Kanazawa Munici College of Industrial Arts and Crafts, where he spent more time doodling than attending classes.

Graduated and jobless, in 1977 he approached a friend of his father's, Hiroshi Yamauchi, the head of Japanese toy company Nintendo. He was hired as their first ever staff artist. In 1980 the firm bought a huge number of units of *Radar Scope*, a new arcade game. It flopped, and with nobody else available Yamauchi turned to Miyamoto for a game to fill the units. With no previous experience Miyamoto gave him *Donkey Kong*. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since then, Miyamoto has solidified his position as the father of modern gaming, pioneering everything from basic storylines and interactive environments to shoulder buttons and analogue control sticks. In 1998 he became the first inductee into the Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame. He is currently the director of Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development, where he continues to push the boundaries of possibility with products like the DS and, very soon, the Revolution.

Things You Didn't Know About Miyamoto

- Miyamoto's attendance at college was so poor it took him five years to graduate.
- He has a reputation for being humble, insisting on being paid an average salary.
- He rides a bike to work.
- He is a keen banjo player.
- During the intro sequence to *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, the mandolin on the soundtrack is played by Miyamoto.
- His wife, Tasuko Miyamoto, was Nintendo Of Japan's general manager in 1977.
- Neither of their children have expressed any interest in entering the family business.

Games™: Due to a bomb scare and herds of bewildered businessmen, we've had a rough time getting through London. Hopefully you're enjoying it more than we are.

Shigeru Miyamoto: I have not seen much, only this room, but it is a very nice room.

g™: We understand you're in Europe for a very special reason having recently been knighted by the Order Of Art And Letters in Paris along with Michel Ancel and Frederick Raynal. This is the first time game developers have received the honour. How does that make you feel?

SM: I have been making games, together with many of my friends, for a long time, so I thought I should receive this honour as a representative for many other people working at Nintendo. At the same time – and the other nominees for the medal all agreed on the objective for accepting this award – it is recognition from friends and governments for doing something very well for many years.

g™: Well, from everyone at games™ please accept our sincerest congratulations.

SM: Thank you.

g™: In fact, there aren't all that people many in the videogames industry that can legitimately be called 'legends', but you are certainly one of them. After such a long career, what has been your proudest achievement?

SM: Well, I think it has been for more than 20 years that I have been working with the same people. Almost identical members created *Super Mario Bros* – the original one – and I am still working with them. With game designers and design groups, people are always coming in and going out, but I am very lucky to be working with so many great and talented friends for such a long time.

g™: Do you have any regrets? Things that, perhaps, you would have done differently?

SM: Whenever I am making new software, I try never to compromise. Even at the very last moment, right on a deadline, when we really have to present a finished program to our factories, I still try to make more changes to make it better. But when the time has come and I need to say, "Okay, this is over", I am the kind of person who will say, "Everything was great, now let's think about the next move". That's why I really don't think that I should have done this or should have done that.

g™: Was there another job you wanted to do before videogames came along?

SM: Yes, when I was younger I wanted to be a puppet-maker and a puppeteer, but if I couldn't do that, next I would like to have been a cartoonist.



g™: The one quality that shines through in all of your games is their imagination. Where on earth do you find inspiration?

SM: There aren't any fixed moments where I could find inspiration in my daily life. When I got the idea for *Nintendogs* it was because I have dogs in my daily life and I gradually became more interested in using the idea. In the case of the Revolution, I would just be holding a controller and notice some interesting movement. I would want that to happen, to make the player experience that same sensation. Whenever I cannot think about any concrete and straightforward ideas, when I have many ideas cooking in my mind, sometimes I will just be taking a bath and then, "Oh! That's the idea. That's the answer to the agony I have been suffering." At Nintendo we are doing many experiments all the time. In the case of *Nintendogs*, that concept was originally experimented with for the GameCube. However, we could not make it playable. When we were working on the concept of the Nintendo DS hardware and we decided to put in the touch screen and the microphone, we just thought, "Wow, *Nintendogs* would be perfect for the DS hardware."

g™: The *Zelda* games are perhaps the perfect embodiment of your imaginative approach. It seems we have been hearing about the latest instalment, *The Twilight Princess*, for ages. When can we expect to see it?

SM: I'm afraid I have been told not to tell many things about *Zelda*, but be assured that we intend to launch it by the end of this year.

g™: Will it be compatible with the Nintendo Revolution console?

SM: GameCube software can run on the Revolution, it can take advantage of the new control system, and then you will have a quite different gameplay experience – when you are targeting the enemy, when you activate the lock-on system, and so on.

g™: Will this be the best *Zelda* so far?

SM: (Silence) …er, I hope that it will. Mr Iwata has instructed me to make it that way (laughs).

g™: Now, try as we might to avoid it, our thoughts frequently wander over to the subject of your new console, the Revolution. Nintendo has never had a strong presence in online gaming. Is this likely to change with the release of the Revolution?

SM: Well, actually, it really depends on how you define 'online'. Nintendo has been interested in the Internet for a very long time. In fact, I think Nintendo was the very first company to ever test online gaming. Nintendo has actually done many different things online, but we have come to ▷



notice that online cannot be the mainstream business – the focus of the big money for any company – and so the media tend to misunderstand our activity in online gaming.

Actually, I try to avoid using the term 'online' myself, so I often say, 'utilising the Internet', in lieu of 'online gaming'. If we start any gaming business utilising the Internet, as soon as we have done so we have to maintain the server, we have to be constantly updating the software, and then money that could be spent in order to make new applications is spent on maintenance work for the existing ones. Many people insisted in the past that online business was a unique opportunity to create something unprecedented, but the fact of the matter is that they actually spend too much time and resources doing the follow-up work on the existing titles to progress.

One very interesting thing about games utilising the Internet is that the players themselves have tried to create something fun. As soon as you provide a player with some power of involvement, they try and create some entertainment among themselves. Now that's a very interesting feature. On the other hand, it is a shame because while the players are creating their own entertainment, designers should still be trying to provide them with unique, exciting gaming experiences. Looking at it from that perspective, as a way for videogames to further grow, I don't think that kind of Internet gaming is appropriate, because most of the time it's just an escape and it makes progress harder. In the past everybody was saying, "Online is the future, online is the future", but I just don't like that kind of idea. I personally don't want everybody to do the same thing, so I was intentionally saying, "No, there are many other ways to provide entertainment".

As long as the Nintendo DS is quite fast and as long as the Nintendo Wi-Fi connection is quite fast, Nintendo can be responsible for operating the applications and services we offer already. Of course, we have to maintain these services and we are happy to remove some of the psychological and physical barriers for people to start a Nintendo Wi-Fi connection. People who are having problems getting started in Wi-Fi gameplay – they have some psychological barriers, they have worries of budget and complexity – and we have removed these problems to a certain level. In Japan we have a buzzword associated with Nintendo: Easy. It's easy to set up, easy to start, ease of mind. Similar concepts can be applied to the Revolution. Already the unique users of the Nintendo Wi-Fi connection top one million worldwide just between *Mario Kart* and *Animal Crossing*.

g™: The main competition for the DS is the PSP, and Sony is talking a lot about interconnectivity between it and the PlayStation3. Will the DS connect with the Revolution in similar ways?

SM: Well, of course, a number of different things about the Revolution are newsworthy, but we try to avoid explaining each minute detail. The fact of the matter is that for a long time Nintendo has been exercising so-called interconnectivity, and we have been realising some of the complexities

"WHEN I WAS YOUNG I WANTED TO BE A PUPPET-MAKER OR A PUPPETEER"
SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

The Wisdom Of Miyamoto:

"A delayed game is eventually good, a bad game is bad forever"

"A game that keeps a smile on the player's face is a wonderful thing. Nintendo's theme for 2006 will be 'Create new fun'"

"What comes next? Super Mario 128? Actually, that is what I want to do"

"Videogames are bad for you? That's what they said about rock 'n' roll"

"Nintendo is the company that makes the most innovative products. I'm not sure I would be able to make games like that elsewhere. At Nintendo I make the games I want"

"I think I can make an entirely new game experience, and if I can't do it, some other game designer will"

involved. For example, we realised that the connectivity between the GameCube and the Game Boy Advance was actually too complicated, and we have been working on solutions to make it as simple as possible. We have the know-how, we have the background, and we have the experience. All I can say is we are working on that subject, but we don't have to say so because we are already exercising these things. Sony just needs to talk about it because they have no experience.

g™: You certainly seem to be taking a different approach to the Revolution than Microsoft and Sony are with their consoles, focusing on innovation in gameplay rather than technological advancement. Why is this?

SM: Whenever any company is creating a new hardware system, it can take advantage of improving the computer graphics processor and the power of the central processing unit. That's taken for granted now and perhaps for some time into the future. We do not believe in the theory that only beefed up processing power can bring us a bright future. The most important thing must not lie there. Our mission on the Nintendo DS is that it has to become the machine that can be played by a wide variety of people, ranging from five years old to 95 years old. I think that to some extent we have already begun to achieve that goal. I also believe that the Revolution is different simply because it is a home console, and home console machines are supposed to be connected to the home television set. The mission of the Nintendo Revolution is to become the machine that is a family member if you like, connecting with the TV system you already have in your home. Thinking in terms of that mission, we do not think that beefing up the computer graphics chip should be the primary concern of the Revolution. I think it's more important to come up with different ways of playing that can be accepted by each one of the family members.

g™: How do you expect to achieve this? Are there any new franchises planned with a view to reaching new audiences, or will we simply see updated adventures from Link, Mario and Samus?

SM: Well, *Mario*, *Metroid* and *Zelda* are our key franchises and we always have to make new games whatever platform we are talking about. They will be playable on the Revolution and, of course, they can take advantage of the unique control mechanism. The average gamer can look forward to an unprecedented playing experience with those traditional types of videogames. But that is not enough because we are not just talking about the average gamer, but also casual gamers and those who've never played a videogame before – for them we need some brand-new titles.

g™: As the only next-generation console currently available, you must have seen the Xbox 360. What are your feelings on the competition?

SM: My personal opinion is that it is good to see better graphics and more efficient processing power, and they are adding up to the current interest in the games, but they are taking no risks. Yes, the graphics are impressive, but as a gamer I think, "Why do I still have to do this?" (makes motions as if he is using a control pad). There is no evolution in the gameplay. I'm the kind of person who thinks that if you are trying to give me a new sensation, why don't I get to do this (mimes turning a steering wheel) in a racing game. So with that in mind, I don't think there has been a great evolution in the gameplay.

g™: This innovation with the control method marks Nintendo out as forging its own unique path, while Sony and Microsoft seem to be trying to do the same as each other. Is this how you see the Revolution competing in the next-gen market?

SM: When I talk about the Revolution I never call it next generation, I mostly call it 'new generation'. I think we can successfully position the Revolution not as 'next generation', not as a beefed-up version of the current consoles, but rather a brand-new console system. If we can successfully do that, I think we can expand the videogame market as a whole and then, in that expanded videogame market, we will have software applications that will be enjoyed long after 'next-generation' titles. We hope the Revolution will become the machine that will be loved by avid gamers and non-gamers alike – in other words, a revolution for everybody.





A Fall From Failure

Big budgets and big names don't always equate to big success. With Gizmondo Europe now in liquidation and the handheld pulled from shelves, we reflect on what went so horribly wrong…

Many A-list stars gathered at London's Park Lane Hotel, pulling up in their fast cars and majestic limousines. Sting was ready to entertain – along with Jamiroquai frontman Jay Kay – while the free alcohol flowed… freely. But despite a host of big names and even bigger egos, the star attraction was a small, electronic device, audaciously touted as the 'next best thing' in handheld gaming. The name? Gizmondo.

It was fitting that this new handheld should be launched with a lavish, star-filled party. As a console, it tried to be all-singing, all-dancing; as a company, it lived life to excess. Here was a firm for which fast cars, big salaries, a private jet and a company-owned racehorse – which, incidentally, took part in only one race and came 14th – were as commonplace as bold ideas announced at inappropriate moments. It spent millions and achieved little in the way of sales. It was ambitious but lacked experience. It wanted the Gizmondo to be taken seriously as a games console but then decided it was better marketed as a satellite navigation system…

Of course, the device ultimately failed horribly. "It's not surprising," says David Amor, the creative director of Relentless Software. "The reasons? Unknown company, low exposure, few big game franchises, and unexciting games."

Amor was one of many who had considered creating for the futuristic-looking device. Like many, he was attracted by its ARM9 400MHz processor and Microsoft's Windows CE.Net operating system – features that worked well as bait for the eager development studio. It wasn't all fancy functions; the basics were also in place to allow it a 'fair' chance against the competition. The Gizmondo had a 2.8-inch LCD screen, left and right shoulder buttons, an eight-way



directional pad and four buttons for play, rewind, forward and stop – handy for its MP3, video, camera, and in-car navigation features – and, of course, the strongest lure of them all: the firm had plenty of cash to splash. "I heard about the lavish launch party and figured they had money to burn," Amor admits. "At that point I thought there was some business that could be done, but get-rich-quick schemes like that are rarely a good idea." Before we delve into that, though, let us go back to November 2003.

This was when former laminate flooring company Tiger Telematics acquired UK-based Gametrac Europe. The firm had been planning a handheld device also called Gametrac and, a month after the Tiger deal, details of the machine began to surface on the Internet. It was aimed at the British market, earmarked for a UK release during the second quarter of 2004, with plans to ship 25,000 machines in time for the launch and, although price details were sketchy, the specifications were enough to set Internet forums buzzing. The gadget was unveiled in January 2004 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Gametrac had already committed itself to a multi-million-pound sponsorship deal, with the Jordan Formula One team, that was to see the Gametrac logo appear on two race cars, so it was pleased to see generally favourable reports of the handheld in newspapers, magazines and websites across the world. "It got good reports because the Gizmondo was a decent machine," says Justin Castle, webmaster for GizmondoCentral.co.uk. "The hardware itself was pretty solid in design, from the soft rubbery feel of the case to the small size, the pin-sharp TFT screen and all-round general good build quality. Though that's not to say it was all good – far from it. There

were a few software bugs – rectified with a 'service pack' download via the website – and dreadful battery life, but that was rectified for the US launch."

WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

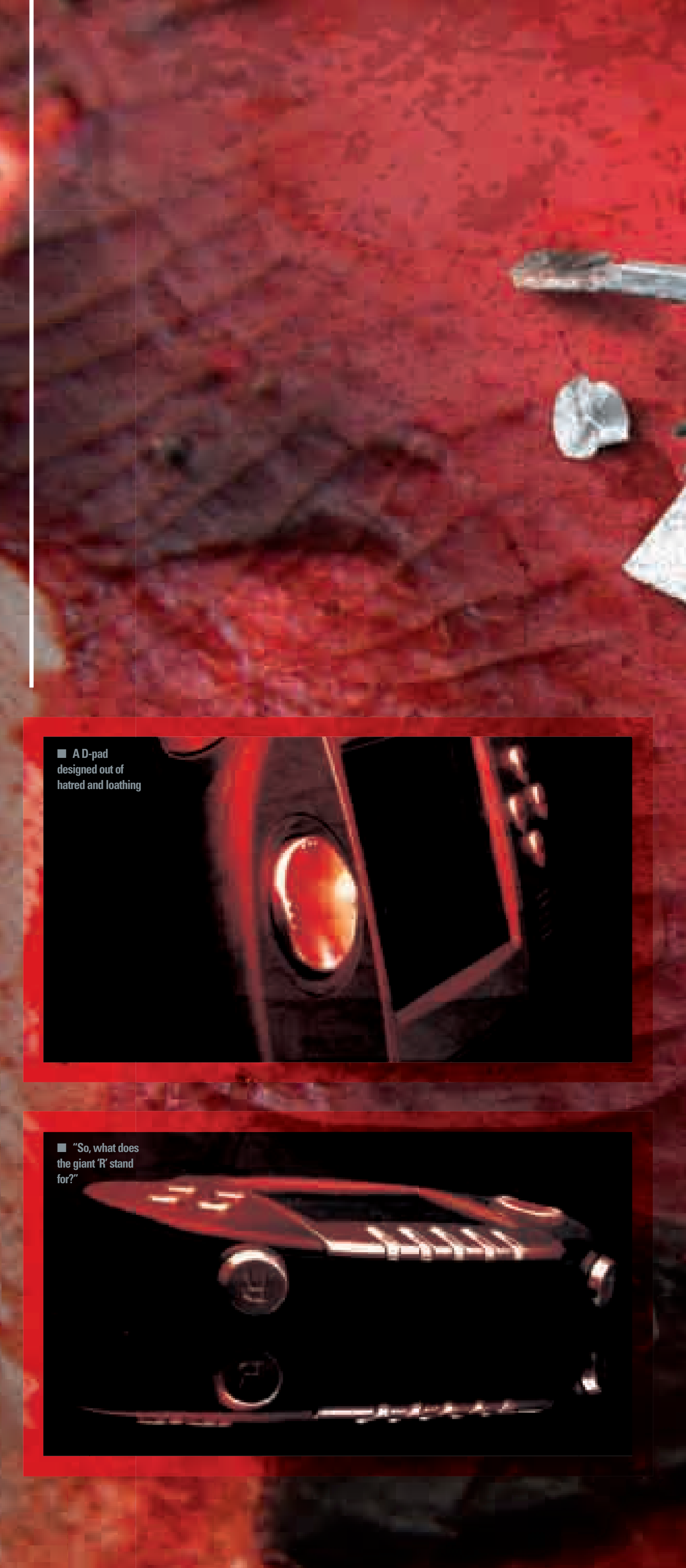
The first real problems for Gizmondo emerged just three months after the CES unveiling. The anticipated launch date began to slip into the third quarter of 2004, and then Gametrac made a decision to rename both itself and its handheld as Gizmondo. Quite why the name was changed was not a hundred per cent clear – its press statement merely said there were 'pending legal issues concerning the use of the Gametrac name', without specifying who had raised those issues – but the new name was devoid of the word 'game' and this was something not lost on Gizmondo, which immediately marketed the handheld as more than a games machine – emphasising the device's GPS and video-playing capacity.

The problem? In trying to attract the gadget fans rather than compete head-on with other handheld game consoles, it became less clear what the Gizmondo was actually for – not least, because the firm itself didn't appear to have a clue. "Marketing the machine as a jack of all trades caused the public to steer clear. People go for machines that they can be sure of what it's actually used for," Castle tells us. By the time the console was displayed at E3 in May 2004, the Gizmondo name was in place, the website had been nicely revamped and appeared to target a 'cool' teenage audience and, just to present some balance, Tiger Telematics become embroiled in a £1.7 million High Court battle with Jordan over the sponsorship agreement previously mentioned – a battle that was sorted out of court some time later.

All of this mayhem was taking place before a single Gizmondo handheld had even reached the shops – not a particularly good sign – and there was an increasing air of desperation surrounding the company as its sailed toward its September launch date with hardly any games. In August, it announced a 'game innovation fund' to 'support emerging developers who want to take gaming to the next level by leveraging the outstanding range of features of the Gizmondo mobile gaming device'.

It all sounds very charitable – giving the little guys a chance – but the reasoning behind the move was largely due to desperation. Gizmondo was failing to attract many of the industry's top names and there was no alternative other than snapping up any development studio that was mildly interested; signing Fathammer in the UK to produce around a dozen games, and spending £5 million to buy Sweden-based Indie Studios to produce games such as gang warfare title *Colors* and the quick-play *City* – both of which utilised Gizmondo's GPS capabilities.

GPS technology was the one thing that separated the 'Giz' from the crowd and, in many ways, the company was right to push this feature to the forefront for all to see. Mikael Astrom, acquisition manager for Gizmondo, said: "The GPS will do to games what 3D did – really adding that edge to what is possible. It's not all about great graphics anymore". For the most part, such bold, confident but, ultimately, silly comments were mocked by consumer and industry alike. You see, the graphically brilliant PlayStation Portable that was set to be released within months, was showing that the 'visual treat' card was still well worth playing and likely to trump all competitors – a point that the staggering number of pre-orders reinforced nicely.



■ A D-pad designed out of hatred and loathing

■ "So, what does the giant 'R' stand for?"



LACK OF INTEREST

This must have been a bitter pill for Gizmondo to swallow. The features that the device offered were, for all intents and purposes, impressive, but it was the PSP that reaped all the attention. This was arguably the company's biggest mistake: assuming that the handheld market is one that demands technical progression. This is simply not the case and the best example of this is Nintendo's line of handhelds. The GBA has remained popular for years and its been technically lacking in almost every area. Few buttons, limited control and basic features make up the GBA package, yet queues of hundreds of people formed when the original launched and then again with the SP update.

"When Nintendo designed the original Game Boy, we knew that to be successful it needed to be small, light, inexpensive and durable with a good battery life as well as having a varied, recognisable library of games for release," Rob Saunders, UK PR for Nintendo tells us. "By following this simple mantra, the Game Boy series has gained a vast following despite technically superior alternatives. That thinking has continued to this day with the success of the Nintendo DS. I think that Gizmondo didn't succeed because it failed to take all of these crucial factors into account when creating the handheld," he concludes.

The UK launch date for the Gizmondo slipped to 29 October 2004 – still in time for a Christmas where no Gizmondos would be unwrapped – and the price was set at a ludicrous £229, which was almost enough to import both a DS and a PSP. Game prices were set at between £9.99 and £29.99 with the only big name title being the not-very-good *Richard Burns Rally.* At around the same time, Gizmondo bought troubled British game developer Warthog in a deal worth $8.1 million. Times were bleak, but that didn't prevent the company setting itself up for further ridicule by announcing the Bizmondo – a smart phone that was largely based on the features of the Gizmondo, but aimed at businessmen.

ALL FUR COAT AND NO KNICKERS

In March 2005, the Gizmondo was officially launched at that star-studded event on Park Lane that we mentioned earlier. Remember? That extravagant affair that was attended by Sting. To coincide, an official Gizmondo shop was announced for Regent Street, London, and nationally, deals were struck with John Lewis, Carphone Warehouse and GameStation. On closer inspection, however, it emerged that, with the exception of John Lewis, only a few stores in each chain stocked the machine – a **games™** daytrip to the store revealed that the staff outnumbered shoppers 3-1, you could get free coffee as long as you glanced in

the general direction of a Gizmondo and they had 'the very same stairs as the Apple store'. Impressive.

With the off-putting price tag of £229, sales were slow and Gizmondo ended up slashing the price by £100 in April 2005 – a Smart Adds version of the handheld was then created delivering up to three adverts a day to the machine. "The price at launch put people off. If the £129 model came out straight away, then a lot more units would have been shifted. The games would then have come," reflects Castle.

Around this time, Gizmondo also announced that it was opening a further 21 shops around the world. "The performance of the London store has far exceeded our expectations, so much so that it's no wonder other gaming platforms have followed our lead," Carl Freer, Gizmondo's European managing director declared, not saying what the other platforms were.

There were high points; EA announced *FIFA 2005* and *SSX3*, while SCi and Microsoft gave their support eventually. It began to appear that the Gizmondo might just work; even the most casual of gamers would be able to see games they recognised alongside the likes of *Colors* and the frankly daft *Momma, Can I Mow The Lawn?* and there were 89 further games planned. Then, in August, Tiger Telematics decided that the Gizmondo would be repositioned as a satellite navigation system with new software Gizmondo Navigator 2006 at its heart. In November 2005, the firm even struck a deal with Ford in the UK. It doesn't need to be said, but attempting to market GPS technology to a teen market? Not a hope. Things went really bad, really quickly.

ON THE WAY OUT

On the eve of 22 October 2005, the day that the machine launched in the US, Gizmondo executive officer Stefan Eriksson resigned and Steve Carroll, the chief technology officer, took charge. The company was on the brink. In Britain, shops were losing faith and Gizmondo began disappearing from view. Ultimately, this meant that Gizmondo soon collapsed unable to sell enough handhelds – British newspaper *The Independent* revealed that just 30,000 gadgets were manufactured – and game makers were disinclined to develop for the format. With debts rocketing to $210 million, Gizmondo Europe went into administration.

Not that there will be many tears. A trawl of the Internet will throw up very scant support for the machine – only a handful of websites. Among them is the store, Gizmondo.allack.co.uk. "We will continue to support the device as far as we can," commented spokesman Adam Cleave.

So, what now for Gizmondo? Castle thinks. "It's hard to say. Some believe the games that were completed or near completed such as *Colors*, *Hit & Myth*, *Chicane*, *Battlestations: Midway*, *Carmageddon*, and *Catapult* could be sold and released, but other than the games, Gizmondo fans are always creating new wallpaper skins to put on the Giz. An email client able to send and receive emails is being developed and a programme designed to unlock the Gizmondo is also underway, which will enable homebrew games and emulators." So, it seems that even though the party is well and truly over, there's still a small community of people working away on projects. We expect this community to dwindle soon, though, and companies wishing to take on the might of Nintendo and Sony in this particular market may want to learn a few lessons – even though most are fairly obvious.



■ Was the Gizmondo just an elaborate bet?

Once Bitten

Before Gizmondo bought Warthog, artist John Lomax had been working on a PSP title called *Stickyballs* but, after the purchase, work stopped and the game was created for the Gizmondo instead. How did that go down? **games™** chats to Lomax

games™: It must have been a fairly nervy time during the takeover, what was the mood like?
John Lomax: There was a mixture of scepticism about the device, and a sense of relief that we still had a job. Warthog was on the verge of going under prior to Gizmondo acquiring our studio. Things went okay at the start; we sat in on meetings with the company directors who were very convincing with their future plans for the handheld. We started getting small perks like free drink and sweet machines and were even sent Christmas hampers.

g™: So what happened with *Stickyballs*?
JL: I was the lead artist on the PSP version of *Stickyballs* but, with us being a competitor to the PSP, we quickly lost the right to release a PSP version, so I was moved, along with a coder, to handle a conversion of the game to the Gizmondo.

g™: Was it an easy machine to program?
JL: Pretty easy to code, but it lacked any decent game-specific hardware. In essence, it was a Pocket PC with a mobile Nvidia GPU. I was never really impressed by the hardware, not after working with the PSP prior to the Giz. We had no floating point, low texture RAM, and the most irritating at-least-a-minute boot time. It was a frustrating time to see my artwork getting stripped back to sprites just to run on the Gizmondo.

g™: Why do you think Giz failed to capture the public's attention?
JL: We were in direct competition with the deep pockets and quality games of Sony and Nintendo. And you couldn't exactly go into your local Comet and buy one with a couple of games. It was quite frustrating to know that a game you worked on would only be available to purchase at the Gizmondo online website or the expensive 'flagship' store.

g™: What could Gizmondo have done to turn things around?
JL: It really needed to focus in on a specific market and target that. The PSP is a games machine with added features. Same with the DS. But the Gizmondo? It focused on too many different things. Content is the key thing for a games machine, and it should have concentrated on getting good quality games and a steady stream of them.



PSP...

Although launched at a similar time, the PSP bettered the 'Giz' in nearly every way. The PSP shifted a quite spectacular 185,000 units on its first three days of sale in the UK, becoming the fastest selling console in the region. While boasting specs not massively improved over the ill-fated Gizmondo, the reasons for its success are abundantly obvious.

For starters, PlayStation is one of the strongest brand names in all of consumer electronics. By attaching a logo extremely similar to that of the PS2, and pushing toward the high-end gadget market (the very same demographic that Apple has effectively established with its iPod), Sony almost instantly assured itself in this territory with its fashionable and highly stylised advertising campaign (which adorn the walls of every tube station in London as well as blanket coverage in magazines and on television); the PSP is being sold as an essential fashion accessory and a must-have multimedia tool that appeals to non-gamers and gamers alike. Gizmondo, on the other hand, had a TV advert with a bee. There are two indisputable facts present here: Sony knows marketing and insects – whether they are too heavy to fly or not – don't sell handheld consoles.

■ Multifunctional or f**k show?



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JAPAN

AS PROTECTIVE AND SECRETIVE ABOUT ITS TITLES AS A JAPANESE DEVELOPER CAN BE, GETTING INTO THE CAPCOM OFFICE FOR AN EXTENSIVE LOOK AROUND IS NO EASY TASK. STILL, SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU KNOWN GAMES™ TO REFUSE A CHALLENGE? AND SO OFF TO JAPAN WE WENT…

Videogame history is peppered with enduring icons. Ask any true gamer to list their most memorable game characters and you'll not only get a handful, but more likely an entire list of recognisable names – and we're willing to bet large sums of cash that many of them are Japanese. Solid Snake, Mario and Luigi, Sonic the Hedgehog… these are the names that childhoods have been built upon, fantasies lived out with and, ultimately, success tasted alongside. And yet, while we're raking in the cash from our last winning wager, we'd like to make you another bet: bar perhaps a fairly even split with Nintendo (which has created more idols in its time than Simon Cowell), we reckon that if you lined up all the icons in a room together, the majority of them would have 'Made By Capcom' stamped across their backsides.

The list, as you might expect, is incredibly extensive – from classic figures such as *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts'* Arthur, *Street Fighter's* Ryu and Ken, and *Strider's*… er, Strider to more recent creations like Raccoon City's own Leon Kennedy and everyone's favourite devil-slayer Dante, Capcom's coffers are brimming thanks to the success it's seen over the years from its extended family.

Naturally, it owes much of this good fortune to its grounding in a huge amount of arcade innovation in the early days. Less than a year after being founded as a manufacturer and distributor of electronic gaming machines in 1983, the classic scrolling shoot-'em-up *1942* landed in arcades worldwide to a rapturous reception – from there, a huge chain of titles emerged to help cement the company's dominance in the arcades, from the familiar (*Ghosts 'N' Goblins* in 1985) to the not-so-familiar (*HiGeMaru Pirate Ship*… what do you mean you've never heard of it?). *Final Fight, UN Squadron, Forgotten Worlds, Saturday Night Slam Masters*… we could give you a complete rundown

THE BEST THERE WAS…

Capcom's sterling reputation didn't spring up overnight – it took a lot of hard work and many quality games. We all have our favourites, but these are the ones that matter…

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR

■ The game that revolutionised the beat-'em-up as we knew it – often imitated, but never bettered (except by Capcom itself). It's the importance of the original that matters; just say Fireball to any true gamer and they'll know you actually mean Down, Down-Forwards, Forwards in one fluid motion.



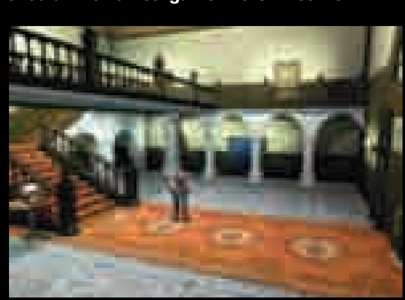
GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS

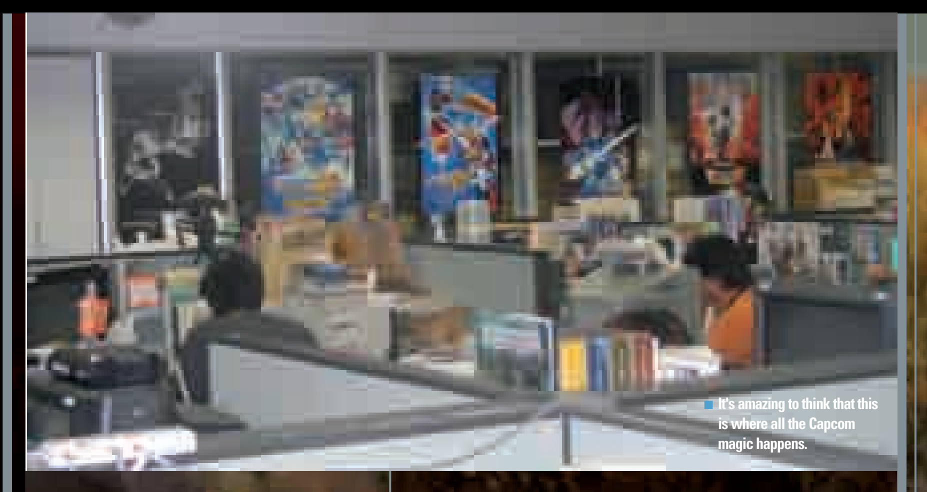
■ Before *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, platform games were filled with forgettable music and very little challenge; *GnG* came along and changed all that by being both extremely addictive and teeth-grindingly hard. Even we've never been able to finish it properly and we're amazing…



RESIDENT EVIL

■ *Alone In The Dark* may have been the first survival-horror game, but *RE* was the first to be fun – think back to the ham-fisted acting and 'that first zombie moment' of the original, and the tension and horror of *RE4*. Everyone should finish a *Resi* game in their lifetime.





■ It's amazing to think that this is where all the Capcom magic happens.

of the games that we still play today on our beloved MAME, if you fancy. No? Ah, shucks.

The key word here, obviously, is innovation; many of Capcom's early titles advanced their own respective genres massively and influenced an entire generation of game development. Without *Final Fight*, we'd probably never have had *Streets Of Rage*. Without *1942*, half the scrolling shoot-'em-ups around today probably wouldn't exist. And without *Street Fighter*, well, we can guess where the world of 2D beat-'em-ups (and, indeed, fighting games in general) would be today if it wasn't for Capcom's innovative evolution.

That isn't to say that the developer hasn't had its off days, though. We can certainly point you in the direction of some real stinkers throughout its lifespan, although some of the more recent examples were only bad because they demonstrated Capcom's attempts (albeit failed) to create games aimed at a more western market; the likes of *Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance* and *Final Fight: Streetwise* aren't really indicative of the company's usual talent. It's when it sticks to what it knows best – namely, creating games that most other developers wouldn't have the balls to get past the concept stage and establishing a unique style all its own – that Capcom really shines…

And just as it did it back in the late Eighties and early Nineties, so Capcom is still taking bold steps in the world of game development with some titles on the horizon that many people are already incredibly excited about. From *Dead Rising*'s tongue-in-cheek humour and over-the-top gore to the visual splendour and Japanese stylings of *Okami*, or *Lost Planet*'s mech-stomping action to the return of Dante and Chris Redfield in *Devil May Cry 4* and *Resident Evil 5* respectively, it's hard to think that the future's looking anything but bright for the company… but then, when hasn't it?

Order In The Court

As far as we're concerned, you wouldn't be insulting us if you suggested that we'd gone mad when enthusing about the joys of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*. It is, after all, a courtroom drama

simulation – hardly the most riveting concept for a game, we admit. But then, it's usually the least likely titles that turn out to be the most enjoyable, and thanks to Capcom, *Phoenix Wright* falls almost perfectly into that category.

"The series is great because it has this pick-up-and-play aspect – it's the type of game you can play whenever you want to, wherever you want to," insists Minae Matsukawa, producer on the DS version of *Phoenix Wright*. "Not all games are like that. In a *Metal Gear Solid* game, if you're in the middle of a mission, you can't just do three minutes and then you're done; you have to play for the whole mission. As a creator, I think that *Phoenix Wright* is a game that caters to when the gamer wants to play. We're not saying: 'You have to play the game like THIS at THIS time'; we're giving them the ultimate freedom of when and how they want to play the game, and that's how it should be."

Of course, the biggest hurdle faced by Matsukawa and her team with *Phoenix Wright* isn't so much making the game playable – three GBA iterations have already proven that it's a fun title to play – but rather getting that fact over to a gaming public that goes for familiarity and mediocrity over originality almost every time. You'd never see a company like Atari or Eidos taking a chance on something like *Phoenix Wright*.

"It's because it's Capcom that we're allowed to make this game, a game which most people would say is too risky and too unique to spend money on," says Matsukawa. "The president of the company, Kenzo Tsujimoto, is totally into having his games spread throughout the world – he wants to share entertainment, he wants to share games, he wants to share these original experiences with as many people as possible. So it's always been his vision when we make any games that we do something that can be enjoyed throughout the world."

Believe it or not, *Phoenix Wright* is one such game. From the incredibly well-written story to the convoluted path of puzzles that you need to solve in order to prove your client's innocence, it's all rather addictive. The only thing you have to wonder is why it's taken Capcom so long to migrate the series to the west… "The way I see it, had the Nintendo DS not been released then this game wouldn't have been created for the foreign market," admits Matsukawa. "On the GBA, there wasn't enough of a selling point, but with the DS coming out and the fact that you could interact with these new features that make the game even more accessible, I was able to get the company to approve it and make the game. So thank you very much, Nintendo." ▶

THE BEST THERE IS…

With such skilled development teams under Capcom Japan's roof it's hard to know where to begin. But those who love games should remember these names…

ATSUSHI INABA

■ Head of Clover Studio, Capcom's offshoot development company that's so far paid massive dividends in terms of creativity and quality. Inaba's touch is visible on all of Clover's titles; from the red hot action of *Viewtiful Joe* to the visual splendour of *Okami*, each of his games are as much a work of art as they are great fun to play.



TATSUYA MINAMI

■ One of Capcom's most influential names to date, Minami worked his way up from character designer to vice chairman of the firm's R&D Planning Committee and head of Production Studio 1. He's had a hand in many franchises from *DMC* and *Resident Evil* to *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* on the PSP.



KEIJI INAFUNE

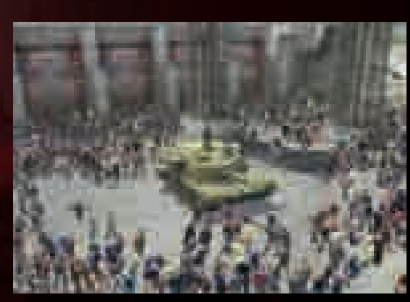
■ He was character designer on virtually every *Mega Man* title, and was crucial in the creation of *Onimusha*. Now Minami's opposite number at Production Studio 2, Inafune is focused on next-gen gaming due to his involvement in *Dead Rising* and *Lost Planet*.

THE BEST THERE EVER WILL BE…

History is all very well, but it's nothing if you can't back it up with exciting fresh new titles to keep people happy way into the future. Here's a taste of what's to come…

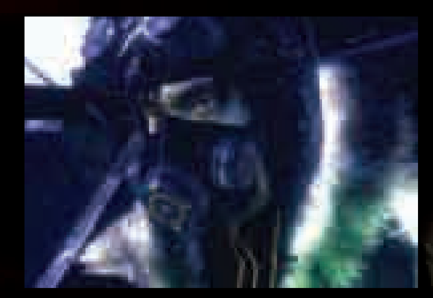
DEAD RISING

■ *Dead Rising's* arcadey gameplay appeals to our fun-loving side. Being surrounded by hundreds of zombies might not seem the most reasonable situation to be in, but when you're armed with a sit-on lawnmower and a pair of garden shears… well, you're more than prepared to take on the world.



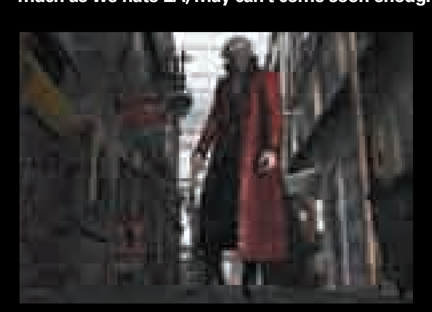
LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

■ As visually impressive as we've seen from the 360, *Lost Planet's* mix of mech-based action and on-foot gunplay is already getting us excited. Hopefully, the story won't get in the way of the frantic action, although, considering Capcom's knack for spinning a good yarn, we doubt that'll be a problem.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4

■ For his sheer 'cool' factor (aside from that second outing), Dante ranks among our favourite game characters of recent years, so seeing him return – and in a PS3 launch title no less – makes us very happy. Rumour suggests it'll be playable at E3… much as we hate LA, May can't come soon enough.



"WE WANTED TO TAKE THE **ORIGINAL** RESIDENT EVIL AND **ADD THE DS'S FUNCTIONALITY**"

MINORU NAKAI, PRODUCER, DEADLY SILENCE

▶ Return Of The Living Dead

Unsurprisingly, Sony has already proven that it's completely possible to squeeze an entire PSOne game onto a handheld like the PSP… but what about the DS? It might sound impractical, but that's just because you have no vision. Holding *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence* aloft triumphantly like some gore-covered gold medal, Capcom has declared itself not just the master of unlocking, but of the impossible too. That isn't to say it wasn't a challenge, though.

"Probably the biggest difficulty that we had was that nobody here really thoroughly knew programming on the Nintendo DS," admits Minoru Nakai, producer of *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence*, "so we had this idea of realising the full PSOne title on the DS – but having to slowly learn the programming, learn the basics of the system and put this game on top of it while we were still getting used to everything, that was no simple task. Thankfully, though, we realised that it was going to be possible and I was finally able to let out a sigh of relief."

Of course, the big question is why Capcom had the sheer moxie to try and attempt such a conversion in the first place instead of creating a totally new game. Sure, the final result is rather impressive – managing to fit the entire director's cut of the original game, along with all the badly acted FMV that we still remember from our youth – but even so, wouldn't it have been better to start afresh? A new game for a new console?

"If you think about a series, as it progresses, it starts to lose that core essence of what made it really great originally," says Nakai. "We chose *Resident Evil*, the first one, because it really did symbolise everything that was truly *Resident Evil*. Maybe it was rough, maybe it didn't have all of today's user-friendly features, but that in its own right also was kind of special to the game. What we wanted to do was take that original, true *Resident Evil* experience and then add the functionality of the Nintendo DS to it , add a few more puzzles, make it a little bit more user friendly, and then create this new version which is more accessible and which people can get back to *RE* basics with."

■ There have been a fair few zombies in games of late, but *Resident Evil* still trumps them all.

They are completely unaware of how much time they've managed to steal from us. Bless.

And accessible really is the key word here. The use of the Nintendo DS's functionality adds a new twist to the familiar gameplay, thanks to the changing of some of the puzzles (using the microphone to perform CPR on a downed team-mate, using the stylus as a knife to slash at zombies, and so on) and other interesting elements. Despite these changes, though, the game underneath it all still remains faithful to the original – perhaps a little too faithful, as far as the difficulty goes, in fact.

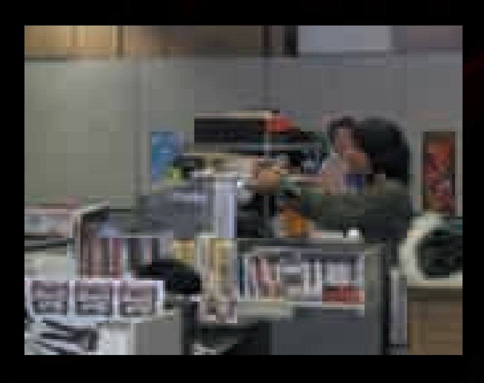
"The game itself has not become any easier; it's become more convenient with these new features," insists Nakai. "What used to be a hassle – opening menus to select bullets and reload them, for example – now can be done with the touch of a button. That doesn't mean that the enemies are any weaker, they still deal the same amount of damage and you still have to worry about whether you have enough ammo, so things like that are not changed. While it may be more convenient, it has not necessarily become any easier; it's still a difficult game."

We Need A Hero

In all our experience of game-based interviews, we've come to appreciate that most developers have a great affection for the games they make. They talk at length about the development process, enthuse about the various ideas behind their creations and even, on occasion, let slip little details that we, as dirt-digging journalists, probably shouldn't know (usually followed by a PR rep racing in to ensure we 'don't print that').

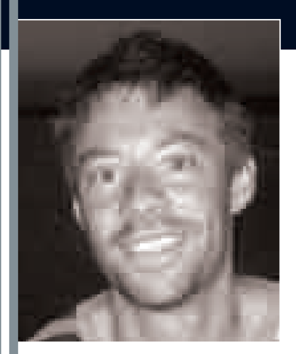
Interviewing the men behind the current generation of the *Mega Man* series, however, is something else entirely – when you're surrounded by Mega Man toys opposite two men, one dressed as what can only be described as the Japanese equivalent of Justin Hawkins and the other wearing a Mega Man blaster and helmet combo, you kind of get the impression that there's another level of dedication here altogether.

"Mega Man is someone that almost feels like another version of me in the future," says Takeshi Horinouchi, producer of both the *Mega Man Battle Network* and *Mega Man Zero* games. "And since Lan and Mega Man are brothers in the *Battle Network* games it's almost like they are brothers to me, but in a different universe. When I was a young kid, I had a great time playing *Mega Man* games myself. I think that the appeal of Mega Man is the fact that you can fight so many different enemies and then take those powers and use them yourself, and as the series has expanded, we've had new characters and new enemies and it's become even more appealing."



Of course, appeal is something that the folks at Capcom have really had to work on with the *Mega Man* series simply because of the differences between east and west. In Japan, the games literally fly off the shelves but over here… well, it's quite the opposite. "At Capcom we recognise that things like the anime and this series of games have lacked popularity in Europe," admits Horinouchi, "and this has to do with things like time delays in the games or cultural differences. But we recognise that this is happening, and are trying out hardest to make the *Mega Man* series more appealing to everyone worldwide."

Quite unsurprisingly, then, moving *Mega Man* onto the Nintendo DS as well as the Game Boy Advance (as well as completely changing to the more user-friendly anime-based strategy combat) has helped expand the series' appeal. But that said, we're slightly sad to see the decline of the original format – those side-scrolling platformers that regularly had us cursing the skies because of their insane difficulty. "The *Mega Man X* and *Zero* series are frustratingly difficult for some people, so I think they're happy with that," says Horinouchi. "The *Mega Man Battle* series fills this gap in our line-up where we can take this Mega Man character and present it to new and younger audiences. But if audiences in general have a desire for the Mega Man of old, then that's something we'd like to hear and think about and consider for making new titles." Cue us, thrusting our hands high into the air.



The Players

WHEN IS A PUZZLE NOT A PUZZLE? PROBABLY WHEN IT'S BEEN DESIGNED TO DRIVE YOU UP THE WALL. GAMES™ MEETS THE MIND BEHIND THE UK'S MOST CONFOUNDING GAME AND COMES AWAY MORE THAN A LITTLE BEFUDDLED…

MICHAEL SMITH

MIND CANDY

Don't be fooled by the suave demeanour, trendy clothes and impressive tan; Michael Smith might just be one of the most devious men alive. True, as the head of Mind Candy – a company devoted to the creation puzzles – he seems an unlikely candidate, but make no mistake, it's true. If mental anguish was a crime, he'd be looking at 25 to life with no chance of parole… and that's if the judge went easy on him.

The reason behind the brain pain Smith has caused is *Perplex City*, a new Alternate Reality Game (or ARG, if you're into acronyms) that's sweeping the world, leaving a trail of cerebral destruction in its wake. As a concept, it couldn't be easier: players buy packs of cards each of which features a suitably convoluted puzzle to solve – once you work out the solution, you input the answer on the website and claim precious points as a reward. The puzzles range in difficulty depending on the colour of the card – from red to purple, up to the ultimately challenging silver – getting all the answers is far from easy. Like Panini stickers for the Mensa generation.

"When I was young, I was given a copy of the treasure hunt book *Masquerade* and it had a big impact on me," says Smith. "I've always been intrigued by the idea of creating a global treasure hunt that anyone could take part in and the concept is far easier to achieve now given the widespread use of the Internet and mobile phones. Using collectable puzzle cards as the starting point seemed like a perfect way to commercialise the game and disseminate the clues."

Meta-puzzles – huge puzzles constructed of many smaller ones – may not be a new concept, but *Perplex City* certainly gives the whole idea a twist. With the aim of discovering the location of the Receda Cube (a treasure 'stolen' from the fictional Perplex City, but genuinely buried somewhere in the world), people have been flocking to get a piece of the action and not surprisingly the cards are flying off the shelves.

"We're very happy with the way the game has been going," admits Smith. "We're trying to build a persistent world over the space of many years, so it's important not to roll it out too quickly by plastering adverts all over the place. People are discovering the world through word of mouth, which will give us a very solid foundation to build on."

Indeed, it's the *Perplex City* community that's played an intrinsic part of making the game what it is – through their enthusiasm and verve each time new cards appear, it's become an overnight phenomenon. But then, the whole ARG genre has seen a massive boost in popularity in recent years thanks to marketing stunts such as *I Love Bees* and true ARG games like *The Beast*, so it's no surprise that Mind Candy saw an opportunity to capitalise on that upsurge.

"We think ARGs are a very exciting new form of entertainment and see their use and profile rising rapidly over the coming years," says Smith. "Many ARGs to date have been relatively niche due to the technical knowledge required to play and the time investment required. The genre won't hit its tipping point and go mainstream until someone builds one that can engage casual players as well as it can a hardcore audience. This is obviously difficult to do, but it's one of the things we're trying to achieve with *Perplex City*."

Of course, with the game still very much in its infancy, Smith has a long way to go – plans to expand the *Perplex City* universe into other media such as books, TV shows, videogames and even a series of films are still a long way off, although it's all achievable if Mind Candy can develop its ARG concepts in the way it wants. There's still the small matter of the remaining cards being released (wave three is due any time) and those dastardly silvers. They're damned hard – when one card appears to ask for the solution to a mathematical equation that's befuddled the world's best scholars for decades, you know there's a struggle ahead.

"We don't take any pleasure from puzzle-induced pain," insists Smith, although a wry smile suggests otherwise. "A good puzzle should be enjoyable not laborious. With such a large community playing the game, we felt it important to create puzzles that people could work on collaboratively. The silver cards are deliberately deigned to be infuriatingly complex; they're best attacked by the hive mind, as opposed to an individual working on its own in a coffee shop."

Ah, so that's where we've been going wrong. Clearly, mulling things over in our local Starbucks with a mocha frappuccino isn't the best method of making progress here, but then, we could have told you that long ago if we hadn't been so busy tearing our hair out over puzzles like Elucidate. Damn you, Smith – damn you to hell.

Wave two of Perplex City *is available now from www.firebox.com.*



"WE'RE TRYING TO BUILD A PERSISTENT WORLD OVER THE SPACE OF MANY YEARS, SO IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO ROLL IT OUT TOO QUICKLY BY PLASTERING ADVERTS ALL OVER THE PLACE"

MICHAEL SMITH

TURN THE PAGE FOR AN AS YET UNSEEN PURPLEX CITY CARD…

PERPLEX CITY: DUDENEY'S MEDALLION

WAVE 4: SEASON 1

Can you solve the puzzle on this exclusive card?

So you've read what Michael Smith had to say about *Perplex City*. Interesting isn't it? The world of ARGs can be a confusing place but take it from us, once you get involved, it can be quite addictive. Obviously you can find out more about this particular ARG and its full story by visiting www.perplexcity.com but why not have a dabble with one of the puzzle cards for yourself? Thanks largely to those lovely people at Mind Candy, we've managed to obtain an early edition card from the upcoming forth wave and we're going to let you have a crack at it for nothing. That's right, c'est gratuit. If you can solve it, you'll be a few small steps ahead of the competition, and will have a few extra points when the wave finally arrives. These devious cards have been designed by some of the greatest puzzlers in the world, so you won't be in for an easy ride. This one, however, shouldn't cause you too many headaches – we're nice like that. However, as amusing as they are, these puzzle cards are only one arm of the ARG. There are also websites, forums and live events taking place if you really want to get stuck in. Find the location of the mysterious Receda Cube that's been 'stolen' and you could be the one walking away with the hefty cash prize contained within. Good luck – this particular ARG is attracting more and more obsessed players with every passing day – including the **games**™ team – so forget end-of-level bosses, you're up against the entire population of the world this time.





HOW TO PLAY...

1. Use your wits and skills to solve the puzzle.
2. Then get onto the Internet and head over to www.perplexcity.com/keyword/gamestm.
3. You'll then be asked to register and enter your details (only a name and email address are required, the rest is optional).
4. Now you can sign in and solve the card.
5. If you are correct, your profile will be updated with the relevant number of points.
6. The rest of Wave 4 will be made available from various retailers next month

For more information and a full breakdown of the *Perplex City* puzzle game visit www.perplexcity.com


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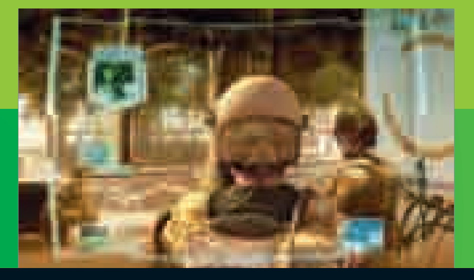
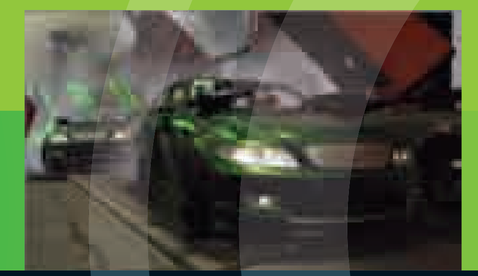
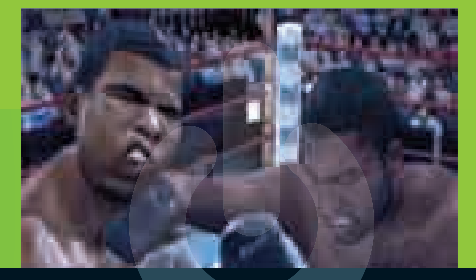
SO THE SHORTAGES THAT PLAGUED THE LAUNCH OF THE 360 ARE BUT A DISTANT MEMORY, THE CONSOLES NOW ADORN THE SHELVES OF YOUR LOCAL RETAILER, AND NO LONGER ARE YOU JEALOUS THAT YOUR BEST MATE HAS HAD ONE SINCE LAUNCH. WELCOME TO THE LIVE REVOLUTION. POPULATION: 2 MILLION AND COUNTING…

ONLINE, ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

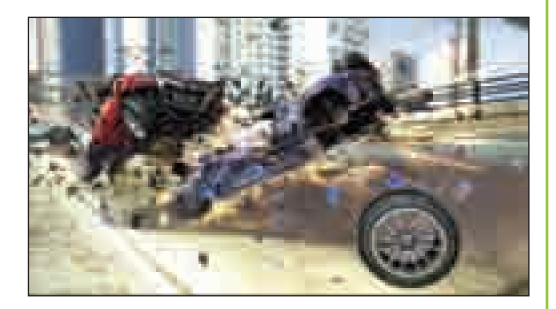
TRIED & TESTED

Xbox360 LIVE TEST

Across nearly 30 countries, more than two million people are playing Xbox Live. Although many of these are on the old-gen Xbox (primarily *Halo 2*) the 360 boasts 50 per cent of its owners using Xbox Live – and going by our own friends lists there's a good chance most of them are playing *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. The last couple of months has seen the release of a number of games with key multi-player arenas. Having reluctantly put *Oblivion* away for a few hours, the **games™** team has been through six notable releases to find out what's worth your hard-earned cash and what's to be ignored and never mentioned again. The games have been varied, the online action intense, so without further ado let's get stuck into this latest Xbox 360 Live test.

EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…



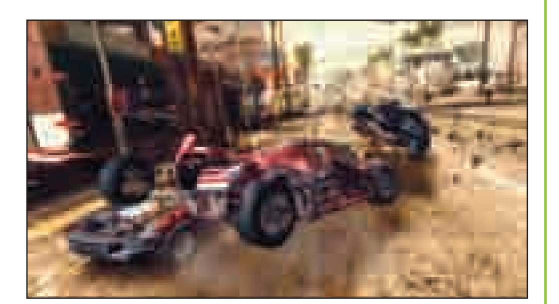
BURNOUT REVENGE

BEST SERVED OLD

Success in the online market is, more often than not, dictated by exactly how competitive the game is. Bragging rights and trash talk are what make these games great and, with that in mind, *Burnout Revenge* is one of the finest on offer.

From the smooth lobby system to the ease of finding adequate opponents, *Revenge* offers exactly what it should. Although the modes are pretty much the same as the title's forerunners', the fact that both Revenge Rivals and folks you've previously bettered are tagged permanently means that the competition rages on – there's nothing sweeter than bumping into an old Rival at a later date and finally removing his mark from your good name by 'settling the score'. The only element that mars the package mildly is the fact that Live owners have probably been enjoying the experience for some time now. This isn't enough to change the fact that if you are online, you should be playing this. After all, nothing says revenge better than a bus in the face.

9/10
LIKE BEFORE, ONLY BETTER





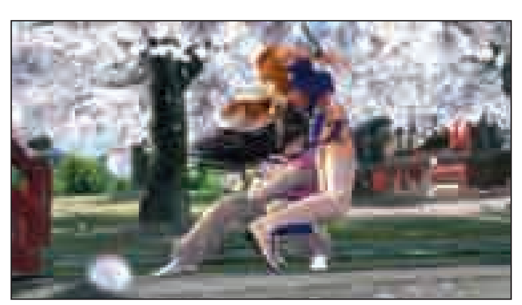
DEAD OR ALIVE 4

LET DOWN BY LAG

After *Dead Or Alive Ultimate*'s first tentative steps into online fighting games, hopes were extremely high for number four. With its much-publicised lobby system (where players can enter an interactive room and watch matches on a big screen TV), beautiful graphics and the immediacy of its fighting engine, everything was in place for a stunning online experience. Unfortunately, it's plagued by lag. Playing against opponents in the States is largely miserable, as the split-second timing needed for counters is near impossible, even with a reasonably smooth connection.

If you can find a buddy who's connection works with your own, then *DOA4* is as much fun online as off. Voice communication allows for the trash talking required for a good fighting game experience – far less irritating than having a stranger yell insults into your ear. It's a shame, then, that unless you're the king of broadband you're unlikely to be able to advance your Live standings and 'career' against our US friends. A missed opportunity.

6/10
SHOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH BETTER



Must Have…

THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER ONLINE ACHIEVEMENTS

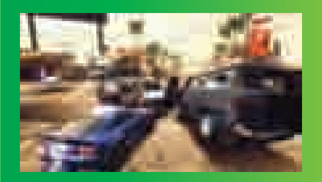
GRAW: SHOOT DOWN 100 HELICOPTERS

Spot soldiers peering aimlessly up into the sky, and you can bet this is what they're after. Still, if it means an easy sniper shot into their prone brains, then it's no problem with us.



BURNOUT REVENGE: OPENING A CAN

The rage that follows the five consecutive Takedowns necessary to do this is satisfying as well as hilarious. As we reached number four, our opponent screamed, "you'll never get the achievement from me!" We did. He cried.



DEAD OR ALIVE 4: SS RANK

Almost impossible to get to due to the inescapable lag, this most coveted of honours places you above Itagaki himself. If anyone has the patience to play through the 8.4 million (approx) fights it takes to get there, then you have our undivided respect. And pity.



Xbox360 LIVE TEST

ONLINE, ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

Arcade Action

THE LATEST BUDGET-PRICED MORSELS ON THE LIVE ARCADE SERVICE

FEEDING FRENZY

A thoroughly dull fish-eating game, where you must avoid the larger sea creatures and munch on the smaller ones until you yourself become bigger. For ever. Not worth the 800 point asking price by a long shot.



TEXAS HOLD 'EM POKER

Free-of-charge online poker action. Perfectly acceptable, and comes with the added bonus of some excellent animal-based gamer pictures. One of us can now be spotted sporting a Labrador face. Lovely.



STREET FIGHTER II: HYPER FIGHTING

By the time you read this, our most anticipated Live Arcade title may finally be available for download. If not, then we shall continue waiting – perfecting our quarter circles on the 360's treacherous D-pad.





FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

GAMES™ FAVOURITE RECEIVES EXCELLENT ONLINE TREATMENT

Once the focus of online gamers' bile and disdain, EA's Xbox Live servers have picked up since 360 launched. In technical terms, *Round 3* is largely faultless online – with only occasional games affected by lag – and the full complement of visual tricks included. The lack of a decent lobby and rematch system is poor, but for competitive online play and bragging potential, you can't go far wrong.

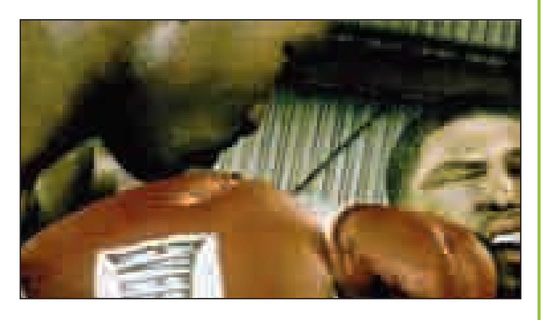
We only had two gripes: the lack of a decent penalty for disconnects (the match goes down as never having happened, with the offender receiving nothing more than an addition to their Did Not Finish percentage) is a bugbear. Also, a lack of balance means that button bashers can often have the advantage over pure stick-based *Fight Night*ers, especially if they choose a boxer with good stamina.

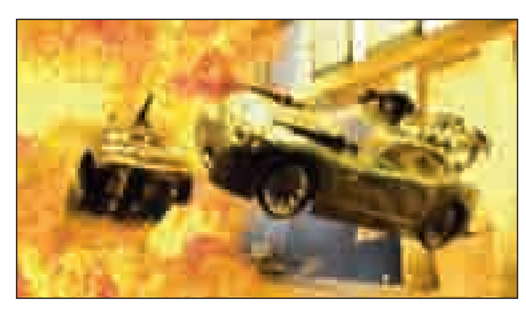
Still, despite these teething problems, *Fight Night* is another showcase for the virtues of online videogaming. Competitive, tense and entirely addictive, it deals *Dead Or Alive* a hammer blow and stands over it smiling.

8/10



FANTASTIC, BUT NEEDS A FEW CRACKS SMOOTHED OVER





FULL AUTO

SEGA'S DEATH RACE SERIOUSLY LACKING IN SUPPORT

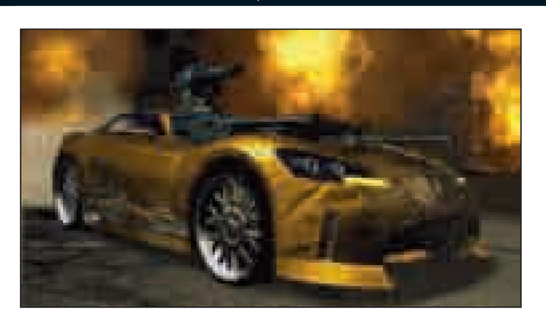
The explosive single-player of Sega's destructive racer should, in theory, translate rather well to the online battlefield. Fiery explosions, fast cars and shitloads of guns? That's an American teenager's dream, surely?

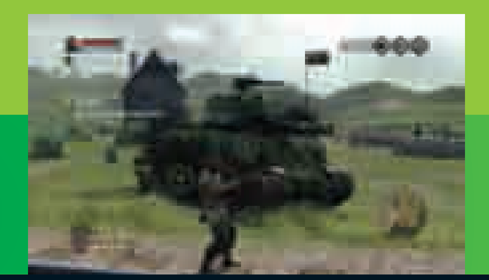
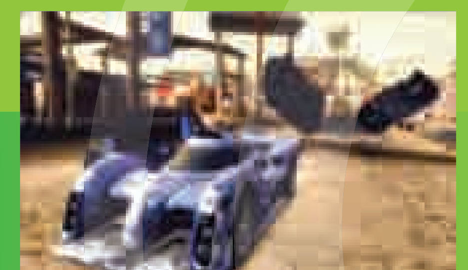
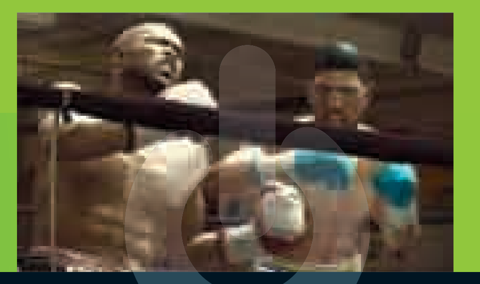
Well, it would be, if there were actually any of them about. Finding a match in *Full Auto* is a tricky business – a mixture of connection issues and a distinct lack of participants mean you'll spend more time in menu screens than on the track. And when you do finally manage to locate a game, there's every chance it will be full of fools because, apparently, *Full Auto* is a lot more fun when you drive the wrong way around the track and scream loudly like Leatherface. We tend to disagree.

It's a shame that *Full Auto* is set to have a short and unfulfilling time on Xbox Live. In technical terms at least, it's near faultless: smooth, devoid of lag and lightning quick. Playing against friends is undoubtedly enjoyable – get a six-player lobby together and you're in for a solid evening of gaming. But who knows six people who own *Full Auto*? And that, unfortunately, is its biggest downfall.

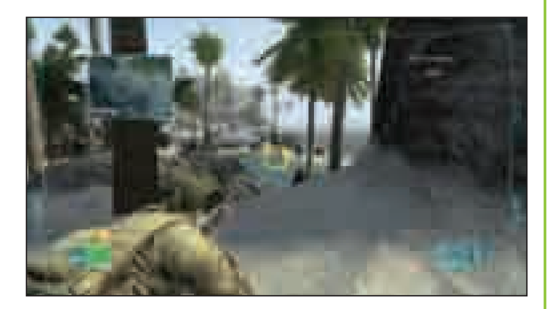
6/10

TECHNICALLY SUPERB, BUT WHERE IS EVERYBODY?



EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…



GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

NEXT-GEN SHOOTER, CURRENT-GEN PROBLEMS

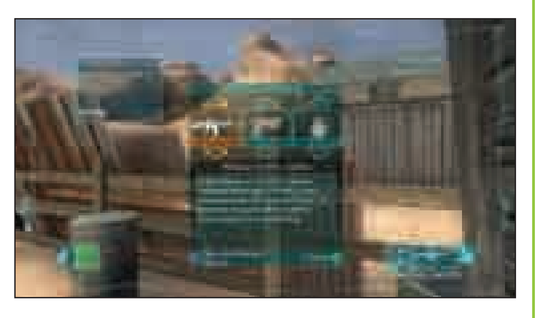
The online play is something that *Ghost Recon* fans have long been waiting for since the launch of the 360. *GRAW* owners will notice that the multi-player looks different – that's because the single-player and multi-player areas were developed by different teams, making multi-player *Recon* look and feel more like a PC'd version of *Summit Strike* – which isn't a bad thing, with some gamers preferring the online look for their multi-player battles.

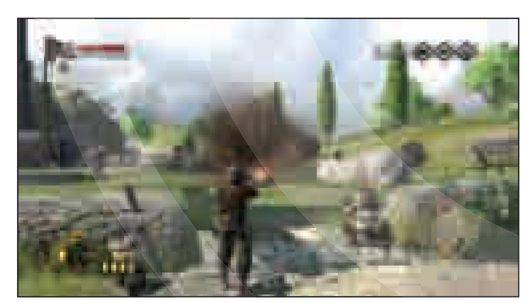
Yet while the LAN battles and multi-player fun (which we experienced prior to the review last month) were flawless in action, speed and enjoyment, the Xbox Live platform is far from faultless with regular dropouts for multiple players in lobbies of upwards of three or four people. Still, a patch update from Ubisoft will cure this irritating problem.

That's not to say that small team insurgences into the co-op missions aren't fun; it's just that with all the customisable options in *GRAW*, the thrills come in 10-16-player battles. You only leave when you've put a bullet between their eyes.

7/10

GREAT FUN WHEN IT WORKS





THE OUTFIT

WAR IS NOT GOOD

It came as no surprise that the gamers online at the time of testing were all American. Furthermore, it came as less of a surprise that said American gamers were talking trash, belittling the manhood of their opponents (who, incidentally, were all American too) and generally producing a wonderful advertisement for offline play. When playing an average gamer and not the hottest onliner this tends to get irritating.

There are three modes to play in: the typical ranked matches, non-ranked matches – both allow you to quick join, custom search and host a game with up to seven others – and co-op, which allows you to join a friend or stranger throughout the single-player missions.

As you'd expect from a 360 Live game (except *Dead Or Alive 4*, of course) there is no evidence of lag, and the gameplay is smooth. With your atypical array of game modes available (deathmatch, strategic base capturing, etc) the online play proves more varied, challenging and enjoyable than the single-player action, albeit only slightly. *The Outfit* won't warrant purchase for online play alone, but will extend its lifespan a while longer.

6/10

WORTH RENTING, BUT THERE ARE BETTER GAMES TO PLAY

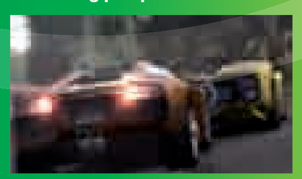


On The Horizon

WHAT ONLINE GLADIATORS CAN EXPECT TO SEE NEXT…

TEST DRIVE: UNLIMITED

Atari's MMO racer is sounding more interesting by the minute. Gorgeous visuals (perhaps even eclipsing *PGR*) and the promise of a completely new direction for driving games, *Test Drive* is a fascinating prospect.



BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

We should be knee deep in the trenches by the time you read this, and the thought of taking our already finely honed *Battlefield* skills into the next generation is extremely exciting. Special Ops – never die.



FINAL FANTASY XI

The 360's first MMORPG (surely there has to be a better abbreviation by now?) is set to arrive this spring, and it will be interesting to see if the console Markey takes to a genre traditionally confined to the PC.



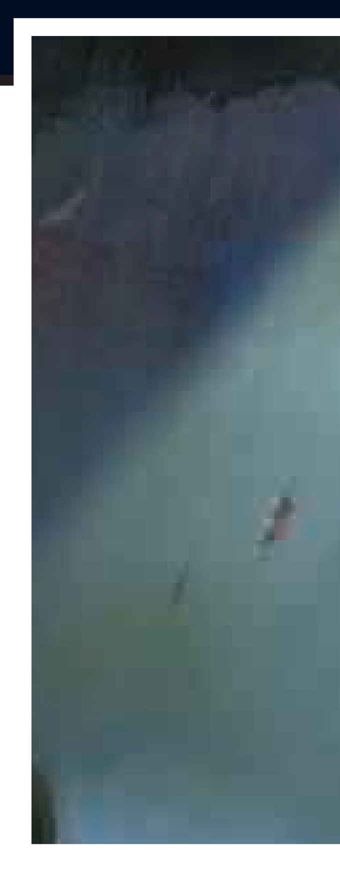


REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, Xbox 360, PC, PSP

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Crystal Dynamics

PRICE
£29.99
(Xbox 360: £39.99)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

A GENUINELY LEGENDARY COMEBACK

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Eidos has a lot riding on *Tomb Raider: Legend*. Hyped beyond belief, kept largely under wraps until a few months ago, and generally considered a make-or-break title for the company, this game is crucial both for Eidos' reputation and, indeed, for Lara Croft's. According to the developer, Crystal Dynamics, the philosophy for *Legend* was 'back to basics', the core values were quality and atmosphere, and the eventual aim was to restore Lara to her rightful place as the greatest gaming icon of our time. A formidable challenge considering that she arguably hasn't starred in anything truly commendable since *Tomb Raider II* in 1997.

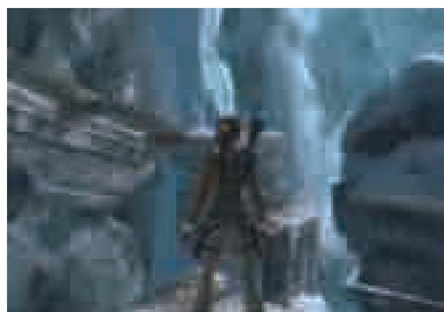
Tomb Raider: Legend is a polished, solid and enjoyable game. Indeed, by today's standards, it's better than *Tomb Raider II*. When played on the 360, it feels like a glorious rebirth for our British heroine, a change in atmosphere from the recent tired entries in the *Tomb Raider* chronicles. From the outset, it's clear that a huge amount of care and love has been bestowed upon this project – its attention to detail and graphical impressiveness even on current-gen machines give it an authentic feel that means you can't help but enjoy it. *Tomb Raider: Legend* has seen real effort through its development, and it shows.

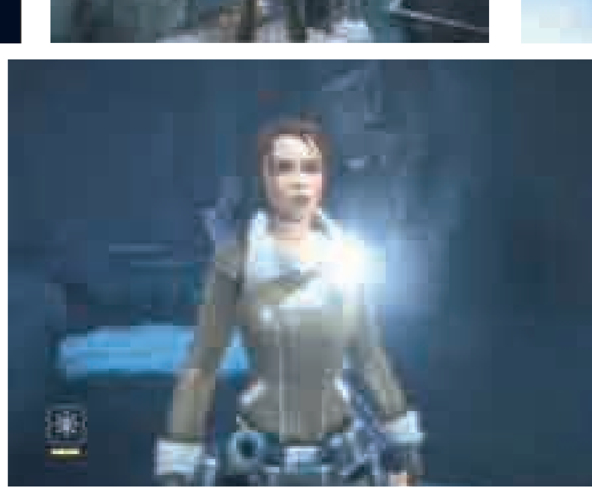
Lara feels like a real character again rather than the brand-name husk of an avatar that she was in *Angel Of Darkness*. Her appearance is right, her animation is perfect, and as the plot progresses you feel an affinity for the character unlike that of any other action-adventure we've played recently. Forced to delve into her past as well as into a variety of gloomy, glorious and occasionally claustrophobic tombs, we learn more about Croft during *Legend*, and Keeley Hawes' voice couldn't be more perfect. The Lara Croft of *Legend* looks, acts and sounds like a genuine Englishwoman, and the authenticity and likeability of her character contribute a lot to the game.

"LARA FEELS LIKE A REAL CHARACTER AGAIN RATHER THAN THE BRAND-NAME HUSK OF AN AVATAR THAT SHE WAS IN ANGEL OF DARKESS. HER APPEARANCE IS RIGHT AND THE ANIMATION IS PERFECT"



Lara always dresses up warm. No unnecessary flesh exposure here! No siree.







It just looks so sumptuous. Compare this to the Lara model from *Angel Of Darkness*. The design ethos couldn't be more different.



FINGERPRINT

games™

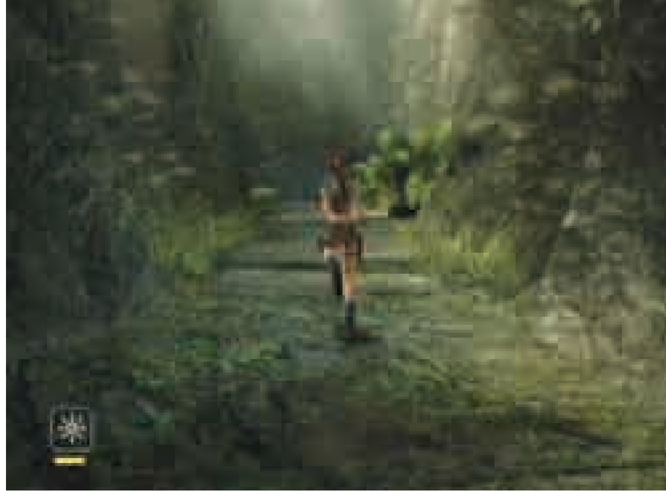
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LEADING LADY: Lara Croft is one of the best characters ever to grace a videogame.

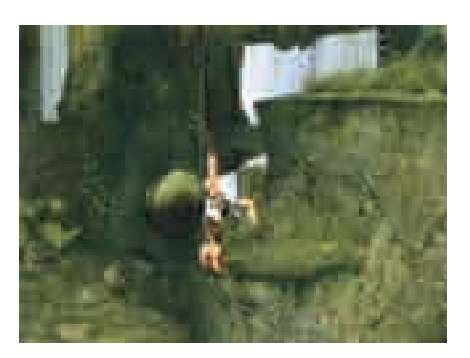
BRITISH BRILLIANCE: The Arthurian plot theme and cast of characters is fabulously British.

PLAYING DRESS-UP

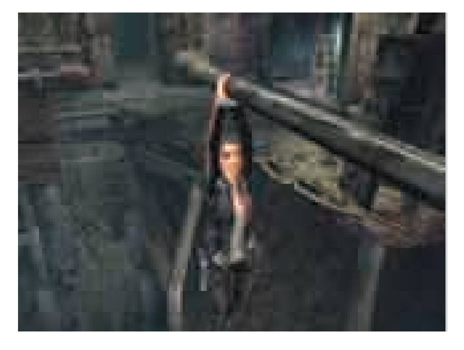
Legend does feature collectables. However, they're less arbitrary than they could have been – where bronze and silver collectables open concept art, character models and other things that nobody cares about, gold ones unlock new costume selections for Lara. When replaying missions in Time Trial or just for fun, you can choose whatever she wears from your selection – silly, perhaps, but indicative of just how much has gone into Lara's appearance over this game's time in development – she has everything from cocktail dresses to biker gear…

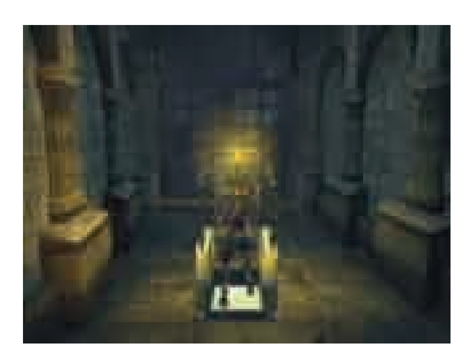


■ The game's levels range from the urban to the lush to the barren – there's more than adequate variety.



■ You can clamber up rocks, or even be a bit more acrobatic. Lara does like to show off sometimes.





■ For someone who loves history so much, Lara seems really keen on destroying things.

It's how Lara controls, though, that was the real revelation when we started playing. She feels genuinely fluid now that she's not constrained by a grid system. Diving through water, swinging on ropes, and leaping between precarious ledges has rarely felt so elegant, and although it doesn't match the acrobatics of *Prince Of Persia*, its comparative realism fits with *Legend's* atmosphere. Only once or twice did we walk away in frustration from an irritating jump; on the whole, controlling Lara is a joy. Especially in dangerous locations, the platforming is exhilarating and rewarding, and *Legend* pulls off the spirit of *Tomb Raider* superbly.

There are moments of visually stunning and genuinely exciting tomb raiding which define and essentially validate this game. *Legend* is full of these great moments, from sliding down fractured glaciers to diving through blades to making a quick and agile leap for a dangling rope, with snow leopards snapping at your heels. Certain events trigger quick-time sequences that could seem a bit of a cop-out, but are instead pulled off well, allowing the developer to showcase the kind of *James Bond*-esque cinematic stunts that the player alone just couldn't achieve. The best moments are those of pure, exciting, quick-reaction platforming of a quality we've not seen in a long time – since *Tomb Raider II*, in fact.

That part of the spirit of *Tomb Raider*, then, has been carried across as well as we could possibly have hoped. The puzzles, too, usually involving a number of stone blocks in a cavernous and befuddling tomb chamber, are reassuringly traditional and complement the game well. We would have liked to have spent a bit more of our

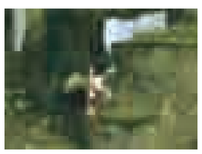


"THE ATTENTION, PASSION AND COMMITMENT THAT HAVE BEEN INVESTED IN THE PROJECT MAKE IT ENDEARING BECAUSE IT'S CLEAR THAT THIS IS A GENUINE ATTEMPT TO BRING LARA BACK TO FORM"

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

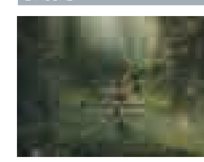
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

2 MINS



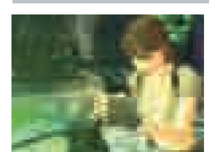
She can move! No more grid system, no more horrible controls – Lara feels perfectly natural as you learn to leap and shoot your way around the first tomb.

2 HOURS



The fourth and arguably most impressive level – as the waterfall parts to reveal an enormous and beautiful tomb, you'll realise that Lara is back where she belongs.

2 DAYS

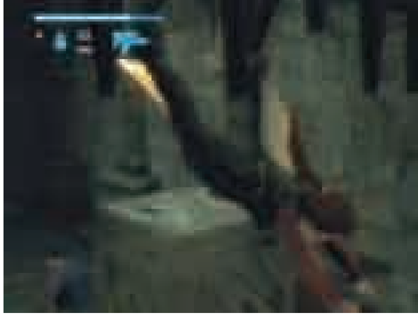


Oh, it's finished. *Legend* feels far too short, and though its cliff-hanger ending clearly leaves the game open for a direct sequel, we want to hear the end NOW, please.

time in *Legend* solving puzzles, but as the game is only a mere eight to ten hours long, it's perhaps to be expected that the chief emphasis of the game would be placed elsewhere. What puzzles there are, though, are generally challenging and ingenious enough to be rewarding, although they don't stretch the experienced player.

The other thing that people loved about *Tomb Raider*, though, was the action – and unfortunately that hasn't come across quite as well. Although far from the combat travesties of instalments past, *Legend*'s combat is not perfect. It's certainly enjoyable – destroying scenery to take out guards and sliding down slopes guns blazing couldn't possibly fail to be fun, and slide-kicking guards into the air then vaulting off them yields a nifty slow-motion effect – but the slightly dodgy lock-on system feels arbitrary and often has Lara shooting across a room while a chap right next to her saps her health. During one boss battle in particular, about halfway through the game, the lock-on becomes a genuine screaming annoyance as a ridiculously fast man with a big sword just keeps hitting Lara in the face while she tries to figure out which way to look. Infuriating.

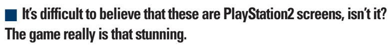
The worst aspects of the game, though, are far and away the dreadfully misguided motorbike sections. With horrible, twitchy controls,



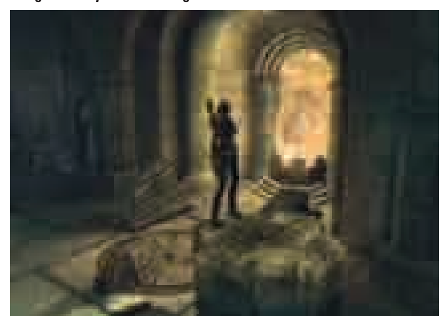
The combat's not perfect, but it does have moments of brilliance.

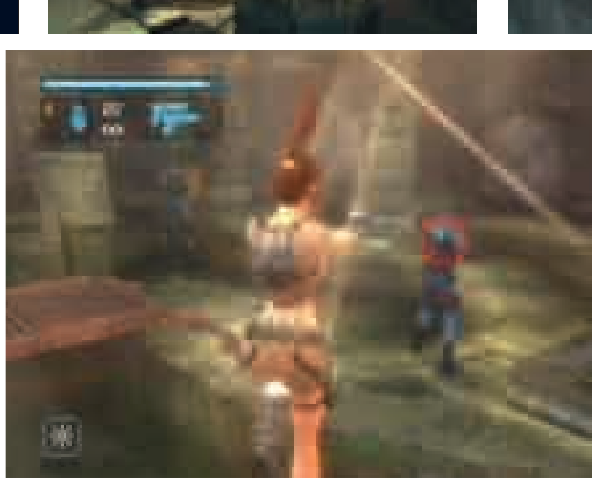
annoyingly unpredictable enemies, far too few save points and instant-death crashing, they are a complete disaster, and though we can see how they might have been fun, we can't understand why Crystal Dynamics strode so brazenly away from what it knew in order to stick in two sub-standard shootey-racey sections that are almost entirely incongruous with the rest of the game. The motorbike moment where Lara leaps from a building and lands on the roof of the next is excellent, but that's because it's about 30 seconds long. The half-hour 'follow the train on a bike on a snowy, slippery track while enemies appear randomly' section ISN'T fun, and really ruined our enjoyment of what would otherwise have been a fairly impressive level (you'll be glad to know that it involves a train wreck and a huge electromagnetic gun).

In the end, it's impossible to deny that parts of *Tomb Raider: Legend* are distinctly uninspiring. The sporadic boss fights highlight the weaknesses of the combat system, the motorbike



It's difficult to believe that these are PlayStation2 screens, isn't it? The game really is that stunning.







See that arm in his mouth? That's Lara's. Oops.



ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

AWKWARDNESS, BEGONE!: Farewell, grid control system of *Tomb Raiders* past!

ACTION HEROINE: *Legend* is adrenaline soaked – far more exciting than previous games.

STATELY HOME

In keeping with tradition, you can explore Croft Manor between levels. Lara's home looks gorgeous and bristles with secret opportunities; it's one big puzzle hiding many of the unlockables. Croft Manor's a fine playground and is, in fact, bigger and considerably more challenging than some of the levels. Its second advantage is that it backs up the authenticity of Lara Croft's character and heritage. And no, you can't shoot Winston the butler in the face or, indeed, lock him in a freezer like you used to be able to. There's no point trying, trust us.





The HUD disappears during sections of pure platforming, making the game that little bit more immersive.

sections are desperately bad, and eight hours simply isn't long enough for us. But when *Legend* sticks to what it does best (tombs, platforming and puzzles – which it does focus on for a good 80 per cent of the game), it's a greatly enjoyable title and an astonishing comeback for Lara Croft. The attention, passion and commitment that the development team has so obviously invested in the project make it endearing because it's clear that this game is a genuine and mostly successful attempt to bring Lara back to form. The plot and characterisation really bring something to the mix, and its universal visual impressiveness means that you're bound to get something out of the game even if you never really loved *Tomb Raider* in the first place. We do love the series, though, and *Legend* is the best *Tomb Raider* game that has yet been made. Despite the game's few grating problems, that's quite an accolade.

VERDICT 7/10

AS CLOSE TO GREATNESS AS TOMB RAIDER HAS EVER COME

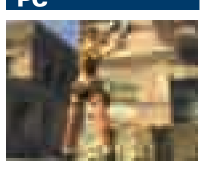


On the 360, Lara drips upon leaving the water. The extra graphical details really are worth the extra tenner.

XBOX 360

Unquestionably, *Legend* is better on the Xbox 360 – the extra graphical power makes the game look truly stunning, and the 360's pad is best-suited to the game's controls. There are layers of extra graphical detail and everything feels genuinely next generation – a real achievement.

PC



Tomb Raider may have originated on the PC, but today it feels more at home on consoles, without the grid system and lack of accuracy on a keyboard. Visually, the game is impressive, but unless you have an uber-specced monster, the Xbox 360 still looks better.

METROID PRIME: HUNTERS

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
5 May

PLAYERS
1-4

SAMUS IS BACK, AND SHE'S BROUGHT HER FRIENDS

The argument of control in FPSs will remain for ever. The PC crowd stands by the accuracy, precision and speed of the mouse-keyboard combo, while console players argue that a squeezable trigger and force feedback add immeasurably to the immersion factor. With *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, Nintendo has sought to combine the two to create some sort of perfect synthesis, but in doing so has created a whole new set of discussion points.

Using the touch screen for head movement, the D-pad for feet, and the left shoulder for firing, *Hunters* initially proves quite unwieldy. It promotes an extremely lop-sided grip for the DS, leading to a condition known as 'Prime Claw', but there's no disputing the freedom of motion the control method eventually provides. However, this smooth, almost mouse-like movement has altered the *Metroid Prime* ethos at its core. While in the GameCube originals combat is a secondary focus behind the themes of exploration, discovery and logic, *Hunters'* Samus shoots first and thinks later.

This ostentatious design change has made the single-player campaign a curious beast. It goes with the tried-and-tested *Metroid* formula of backtracking through explored worlds upon the discovery of a new item, and manages to retain the overbearing loneliness and isolation that made the home console versions so memorable. On the other hand, placing more focus on combat means that it's significantly less relaxing. Still, *Hunters* manages to find a balance between the two styles; the single-player is solid and effortlessly enjoyable.

As has become the *Metroid* way, it looks lovely. Clearly light years behind the visually enthralling Cube games, the fact that such a coherent and attractive universe has been crafted using the DS's meagre specs is quite an achievement – the frame-rate is smooth, only dipping during hectic firefights. There's a noticeable change in ambience and style when flitting between planets (Samus now selects her destination using a map, and lands wherever she deems fit for inspection), and while never reaching the heights of Phendrana Drifts, the environments are full of character, humming with industry and scored with a typically understated soft techno purr.

At pertinent moments during Samus' time searching for the Octoliths, she'll be ambushed by one of the eponymous Hunters – alien bounty hunters who'll stop at nothing to steal her treasure.

games™ CONNECTED

ONE CAREFUL OWNER: 1-4-player deathmatches are available from a single cartridge.

DO YOU COPY?: Voice comms work in a similar way to walkie-talkies – press X and chat away.

FAQs

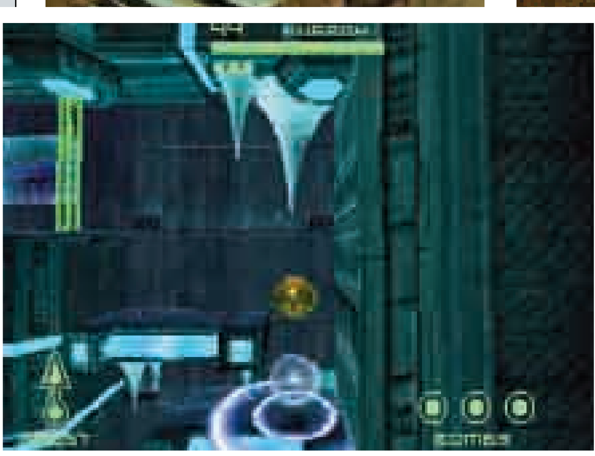
Q. DOES IT WORK?
Certainly does – smooth, tight and well designed.

Q. GOOD MUSIC?
As ever, the audio treatment is top class.

Q. MORPH BALL?
It's in there, bombs and all.

The different buttons on the touch screen all link to Samus' abilities.







The metallic effects are quite stunning considering the DS's relative lack of power.

TOUCHING BASE

***Hunters'* unique control method is bound to split opinion but, once mastered, provides a competent way of moving though a 3D space. Surrounding the main area of the screen are buttons to change visor or weapon types. A brief hold of the stylus on the lowest icon switches vision to scan mode – integral to the *Prime* experience – while tapping the upper buttons gives access to Samus' missiles, and plasma types. Admittedly, switching to Morph Ball mode accidentally when attempting a crucial jump can be DS-chuckingly irritating; on the whole, though, *Hunters'* control is a resounding success.**



The morph ball puzzles make for a welcome break from all the blasting.



Each Hunter has unique abilities and weapons, but Nintendo has attained a good balance between characters.

When these encounters occur, the game turns into a deathmatch: cue circle strafing, headshot attempts and frantic stabbing for the missile button on the touch screen. Compared to modern console FPS games, these one-on-one fights are fairly primitive and, while punctuating the solitude with some welcome drama, do feel inescapably dated.

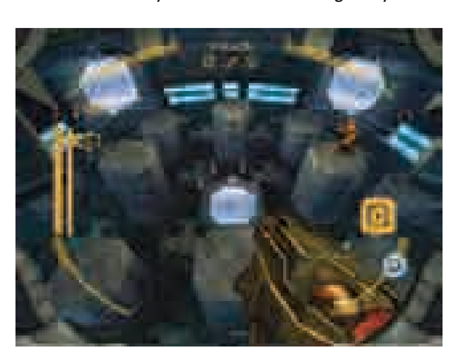
The same can be said of *Hunters'* multi-player. Available both over Wi-Fi and ad hoc system link, *Hunters* with friends is an old-school, arena-style multi-player FPS, with the focus on power ups, accuracy and survival. Players can choose between any of the game's 'Hunters' – each with their own weapon types and 'morph ball' forms – and take it to their opponents in matches constructed around the number seven (minutes of play and 'first to'). Over Wi-Fi it's an impressive effort; the new voice chat system requires nothing more than holding the X button to talk, and only those on your in-game Friends List can hear you, and vice versa. This removes the 'unwanted' element – namely foul-mouthed teenage boys.

For a handheld multi-player FPS (the first of its kind, no less), this is an astounding achievement. No lag, ultra quick and thoroughly entertaining – train journeys and coach trips will soon be violent, competitive arenas the world over. When compared to playing an online shooter over Live or PC, though, it falls someway short. Still, *Hunters* should be commended.

Nintendo has kept its Samus-hungry audience waiting for a long time, and pleasingly it's turned out to be worth the delay. Broken arms aside, *Metroid* on the DS is a smooth, attractive and compelling FPS that shows what the machine is capable of, cramming in a fulfilling multi-player mode to boot. Those hunting the supreme *Metroid* experience are still better off staying with the GameCube (*Prime* was the first ever **games™** 10/10, after all), but as a portable cousin, *Hunters* is consistently excellent.







Multi-player arenas display a rather impressive sense of size and scale.



At first *Hunters* may feel unwieldy, but you'll get accustomed to it.



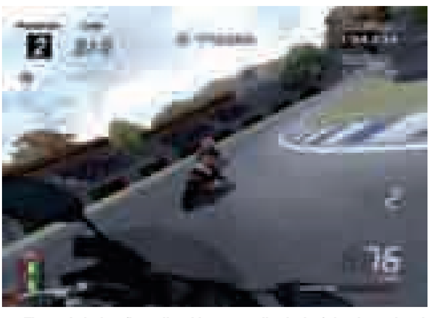
Samus is a trigger-happy worry-about-it-later kind of girl these days.



Photo manipulation and enhancement is again a breeze. It's even possible to print via the console's USB port.



The game's at its best when races consist of a pretty much constant running battle between groups of riders.



The cockpit view fixes all problems regarding lack of visual speed, and is a huge improvement on the parent title.

TOURIST TROPHY

TEAM GRAN TURISMO TACKLES TWO WHEELS…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Polyphony Digital

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
Japan/US: Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Like the game's camera during crashes – which centres upon your showroom-pristine bike rather than the far more entertaining mangled remains of its former occupant – Polyphony Digital has often been accused of making some of the world's greatest racing machinery seem as dull as ditchwater, simply through errant focus. The one major gripe shared by many with the development team's last four-wheeled adventure was, of course, the continuing lack of vehicle damage. Important for reasons much deeper than the cosmetic, the omission left players free to bat about the racetrack as aggressively as they pleased – even the honest had their illusion spoilt by the fact that one oh-so-wrong shunt on the final corner was the only obstacle to victory. It might have been Real Driving™, but real racing?

Just over a year on, and while the interface and obsessive tinkering remain, the one obvious enforced change adds the necessary, exhilarating level of risk required to feel truly 'there'. This is, of course, the possibility of becoming intimate with the tarmac. The fact is, motorbike racing is a very different animal, and *Tourist Trophy* recognises this fact. Veering off the course is a near-fatal mistake. Eliminating any impure corner cutting, the game, instead, is to hug each bend forming a perfect arc, shaving milliseconds from your lap time with each successful braking manoeuvre.

Furthermore, bikes exhibit quite an alarming (but nevertheless realistic) degree of drift. Consequently, racing action can be hair-raisingly tight with riders packed nose-to-tail through successive sectors, swinging to and fro in front of each other. It's all actually quite an exact science, and one which those not so familiar with the smell of a good set of leathers will take upto a full sitting to acclimatise to. Regardless of the fact that the game doesn't quite replicate the sheer precariousness of hurtling down a track at breakneck speed to the degree it should, the refreshing risk/reward balance merits the perseverance of anyone willing to give it a go.

Sadly, though, a truer phrase was never spoken as lessons are still yet to be learned regarding correct pacing. Put simply, it utterly fails to grab you, while the Career mode features mandatory driving tests as an unskippable tutorial – a heinous crime. Once into the meat of the package, too, it's easily four or five hours before the opposition is more than a single vehicle. This really isn't on – it'd be a welcome change to see the intensity of competition assuming a higher priority than the riders

FAQs

Q. THE SCIENCE BIT?
Well, there are 37 courses and 180 licensed sports motorcycles from 12 manufacturers. Should adequately satisfy everyone.

Q. THERE'S NO DAMAGE?
No, riders simply hit the floor then reappear, flashing. Punishes to just the right degree.

Q. SURELY THAT'S TOO EASY?
It's possibly a little lenient on bad braking into corners, but at least it's fun.



The menu system between licence tests still grates somewhat, but at least there's a memorable challenge or two, including this avoidance set piece.

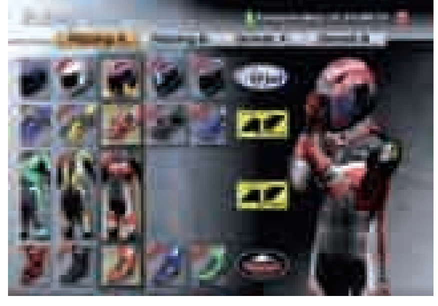
IT'S NOT WHEN YOU TURN…

Those who like detailed racing will find the riding form options fascinating. Although novice riders can and should make do with default settings, there are a total of 11 alterations that can be made to the leaning stance, from torso yaw angle to the position of your head round corners. Additionally, through your in-game garage, it's possible to set the stiffness of your bike's suspension, brake balance, gear differentials, the list goes on. It's this sort of comprehensiveness that has become Polyphony Digital's hallmark. Better still, the lack of an in-game currency means you're free to tinker to your heart's content, perfect racing sandbox.

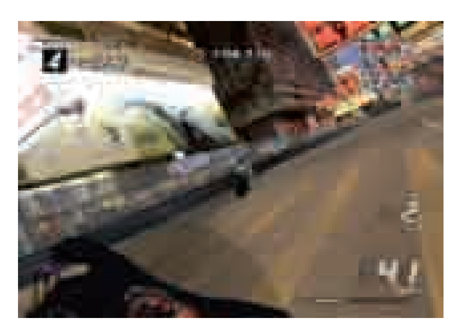




The gear indicator's movement to the far right side of the screen makes the novice's life a little more difficult.



Dressing up will become a part of your *Tourist Trophy* ritual. Well, you've gotta look good for Photo mode.



themselves, or at least to be convinced that this was the intention.

All petty quibbles really, given the quality of *Tourist Trophy's* overarching structure. Obviously, the goal is to progress through the 22 pleasingly bite-sized championships divided by variables such as engine displacement and era of motor sport, however, machines are earned through an old-school Mirror mode duel. This involves, for example, successfully catching and overtaking a CPU-piloted opponent then holding onto first place for a count of ten (or alternatively, crossing the finishing line in front).

The added bonus for petrolheads is that there's always something to do if the most pressing challenge presses too much – shiny things are there to be collected and played with, something Polyphony Digital has practically made an art form of. Your entire riding form (that is, the body position when entering corners) can be tweaked to provide the perfect balance of grip and aerodynamics, there's the usual amount of licence-backed dressing up to be done with your avatar, and Photo mode puts in another welcome appearance.

All such diversions, engaging as they are, would account for nothing were they not accompanied by handling that makes you believe that every convincing lead you open up has been strived for and truly earned. Victory does, indeed, feel the result of constantly improving ability rather than a huge technical void between racers. In a way, the removal of cars from the *Gran Turismo* mould seems to fix the few problems the series had at a stroke. Competitors are more closely bunched, the less forgiving racing line pretty much negates any artificial intelligence issues, and foul play has been checked by the fragility of the featured vehicles. Nevertheless, it's impossible to shake the feeling that this is a game that has been forced into being fun.

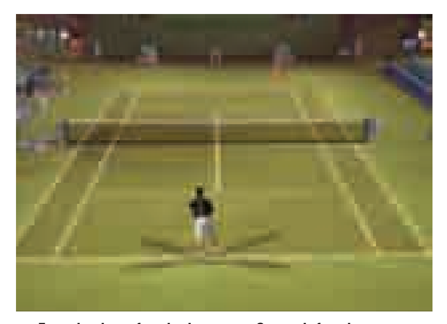


VERDICT 7/10

IRONICALLY THIS ONE HAS LEGS, EXPECT A SEQUEL







Executing the perfect shot is very rare. So rare, in fact, that you may never manage to pull one off.



"Hey, Tim, did you forget your racket too? I guess we'll be playing with our hand rackets again."



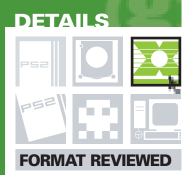
You can play as famous sportsmen and women, but the real fun comes from creating your own tennis star.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CREATIVE PROWESS: Character creation is better than in the original, incorporating hair colour, skills and attributes, and different sponsors and sportswear. Career mode is the highlight.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Sports

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

TOP SPIN 2

TOP OF THE RANGE

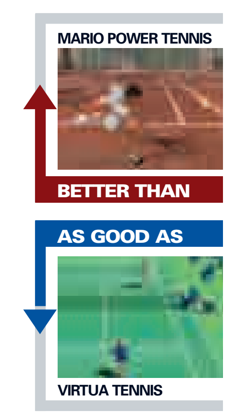
***Top Spin 2* badly needs a Tutorial mode.** To anyone who played the original on the Xbox, *Top Spin 2* will feel reasonably familiar, but for everyone else the mechanics take a lot of getting used to. Only by fumbling your way through almost an entire season of Career mode can you get a basic grounding in the essentials of the game from your coach, and by the time you get to the end of that first season you'll probably be so far behind that you'll have to restart anyway. Once you get to grips with the sensitivity and depth of the controls, though, it becomes a very accurate and enjoyable tennis game – probably the best one available at the moment.

Four types of shot are mapped across the Xbox 360 pad – safe shots, slices, spin shots and lobs. Where safe shots never go out, the others all involve an element of risk and will fly way, way out unless you pull them off well. The game also implements risk shots, executed by holding the R trigger and releasing the shot button at just the right time. These, unfortunately, are somewhat less accomplished than the standard shot mechanics – they work on an all-or-nothing basis, meaning that if you release the slightest bit too early or late the shot simply won't work, making them unviable for most situations. We can't understand why they've been implemented in such a way – it would be much better if near-perfect timing produced a near-perfect shot as opposed to an entirely failed one. As the difficulty increases, the AI gets more and more prone to pulling perfect risk shots out of the bag on every other point, and because they are so difficult to execute it tends to leave you without a way to retaliate. Consequently, in its later stages, *Top Spin 2* feels very unfair.

Risk shots aside, though, this is a near perfect tennis game, making it even more of a shame that they're so imperfectly implemented. The Career mode has a lot of depth and really draws the player in, and in multi-player the game really comes into its own. Although these aren't the most impressive graphics we've seen from the Xbox 360, the presentation is bright and professional and lends a great feel to the title. If you really love tennis games, you're likely to enjoy this as much as anything else on the system so far. If not, though, you'll probably get easily frustrated with it. We're still waiting for our perfect virtual tennis but, for now, this is as close as you can get.



FALLS SHORT OF PERFECT



SHAKE IT LIKE A POLAROID PICTURE

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 4

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 per pay

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Scoring a lightgun game for review is a tricky business when the game in question sits in the middle of a busy arcade. It's rare to pump coins into any shooter and come away dissatisfied – the base thrill of holding a weighty pistol (or in this case, Uzi 9mm replica) and firing at the large, high-res screen is unanimous. So what makes *House Of The Dead 4* better than its predecessors and a chunk of its competition?

The answer, quite simply, is 'more'. More enemies. More polygons. More bullets. And more thrills per pound than every lightgun game ever created. *Time Crisis* may oust it technically with its ingenious duck mechanic and pixel-perfect accuracy, but nothing beats the feeling of cutting down a 20-strong swathe of zombies with a concentrated burst of hot fiery death. *House Of The Dead 4* captures the very reason why we visit the arcades: an amusement ride through stunning visuals and relentless fast-paced action.

The most apparent difference between this and the rest of the 'House' series is the number of enemies on screen. As with Capcom's *Dead Rising*, *HOTD4* throws more undead beasts at the player than you would have thought possible – hence the bullet-spewing Uzi. Accuracy is overshadowed by tenacity and speed of thought, so it pays to keep one eye on the encroaching monsters and another on the background – you never know what's about to leap out of the black.

This shoot-'em-up strives to take the usually limited genre in a new direction, increasing the interactivity between player and game world. At choice moments, the game will demand you vigorously shake your weapon to relinquish an enemy's grip. It's also possible to be pushed to the floor while the game tasks you with fending off monsters from a worm's-eye perspective. These tricks may seem crude, but they break up the action nicely – as do grenades for use against large groups of zombies, adding a tactical edge to a style of game normally devoid of thought.

It's the spectacle that will keep you plugging in the nuggets, though. With its incredible boss battles – a series high point – lashings of gore and a suitably daft storyline, *House Of The Dead 4* is perfect arcade fodder. Very limited, but effortlessly entertaining. There are worse ways to lose a pound coin.



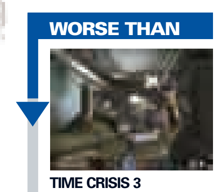
VERDICT 8/10
SUPERB ARCADE FARE

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 3

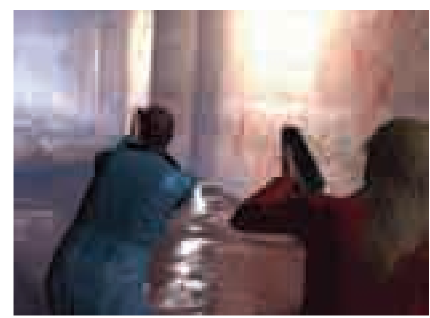


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TIME CRISIS 3



The script, as usual, is daft and incoherent – and people wonder why Uwe Boll's movie was so bad.



There are more zombies on the screen than ever before, even if they do all look the same.



Ladies and gentlemen, may we introduce our new editor Mr Paul Morgan.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SHAKE IT: Waggling the gun causes zombies to fall off, doors to open and boss battles to be won.

BOOMSTICK: The Uzis come equipped with grenades, perfect for scattering zombie fools.

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY IS HERE…

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
Bethesda Softworks

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

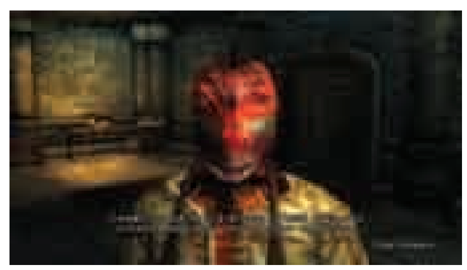
PLAYERS
1



How many choices? How big? How far does it stretch? For every step you take in the world of *Oblivion*, there's a new question you'll ask yourself. You'll be astounded by the size, overwhelmed by the choices and thrilled that games still have the capacity to deliver on their grandiose promises.

It's testament to the hard work that Bethesda Softworks has put in that you rarely find a question in *Oblivion* with a disappointing answer. Every boundary you test isn't there, every NPC you kill slumps to the ground, every wicked idea that tries to twist the AI succeeds or fails with surprising results but never leaves you disappointed. *Oblivion* is the prettiest, biggest next-gen playground you'll ever visit. There's so much to do, so much to manipulate and so many quests to complete that even once you've seen the end credits roll and bled the game dry of its token 1,000 gamer points, you'll be coming back for more. If nothing else, putting the AI under the thumb of your own harsh experimentations almost warrants a game in itself.

There are some limitations – prominent characters can only be knocked unconscious while some doors need hidden keys to unlock them – but these really are the smallest of tracks to ensure *Oblivion*'s ambition doesn't send the main quest hurtling off the rails. Beyond that, it's up to you what you do. A small, red arrow on your compass will point your way toward Brother Martin and the gates of Oblivion that lie in the main quest, but there's just as much waiting outside the central storyline. Side quests, guilds, vampire hunters, outlaw camps, missing daughters, treasure tombs, hidden fortresses, corrupt guards… the list goes on. The joy of playing is in unearthing hidden treasures dotted around the world and sparking off various chains of events that lead to further surprises such as



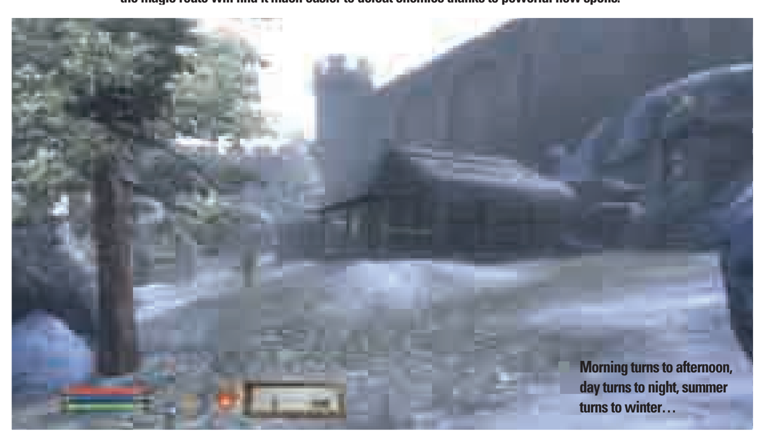
Conversation success depends on several factors – your Speechcraft skill, your race, whether your weapon is drawn, your past history...



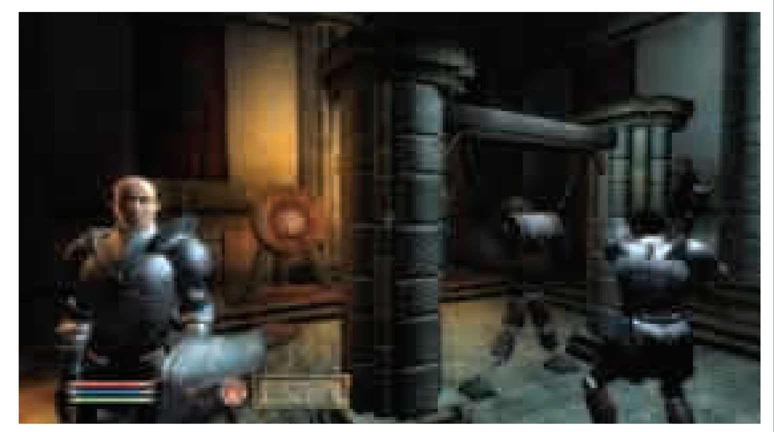
Bethesda has addressed the issues of balance found in *Morrowind*, so those going down the magic route will find it much easier to defeat enemies thanks to powerful new spells.

BOOSTING

As with *Morrowind*, it's quite easy to simply boost your way and level up simply by spamming certain spells. For example, if you picked Conjuration as a major skill, all you need to do is constantly cast a spell that falls under the Conjuration banner – such as Summon Skeleton – until you run out of Magicka. At this point, you wait for your Magicka to recharge, and then do it again. Easy? Yes, but there's a consequence that needs to be considered – all the enemies in the game level up or are replaced by stronger creatures. Head to the first Oblivion gate as a Level 15 Dark Elf rather than Level 1, and you'll find the feeble scamps and goblins have been replaced by spider guardians, stone Atronachs and eight-foot lizards.



Morning turns to afternoon, day turns to night, summer turns to winter…



The Fighters Guild is home to soldiers who can train you.

guild invites, NPCs trying to gain revenge, or even more quests. It's no exaggeration to say that no two players will carve the same path through *Oblivion's* world. There's just too much scope to abandon the storyline and do your own thing, whether it's hunting out quests or just hunting wildlife in the open.

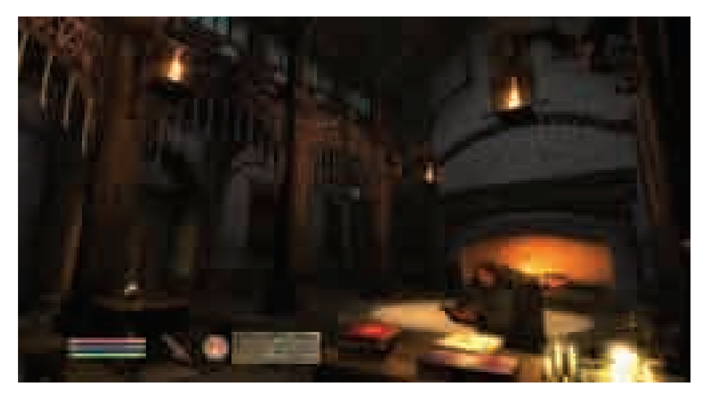
Much of the credit should go to the design of the quests themselves, which are well thought out and perfectly paced. Few stick to the original task they designate to you, so investigating the dead body of a vampire will lead to tracking down a treasure hunter in a cave, while elsewhere fetching a book from the Count of Bravil ends up with a fight against a group of Necromancers at the break of dawn. Even the way these quests are conducted is open for interpretation. Assassination quests can be done blood and thunder-style as you simply storm your target in open ground, but that's not to say that breaking into the house at night and killing them in their sleep, or even observing their daily routine and then sneaking a poisoned apple onto the dinner table won't work.

The difficulty remains even throughout while the enemies level up as you do – through daily office banter, we've already learned that new enemies will appear and new rewards are granted to match your position in *Oblivion's* world. You can spend 30 hours playing without levelling up

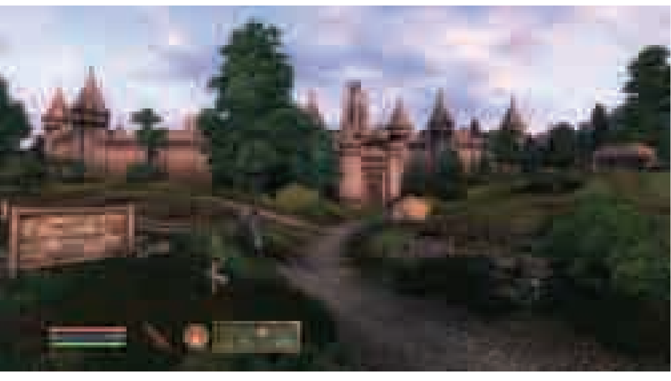
"THE PRETTIEST NEXT-GEN PLAYGROUND YOU'LL EVER VISIT. ONCE THE END CREDITS ROLLS YOU'LL BE BACK FOR MORE"







Martyn proves an integral part of the story's surprising ending…



Scout terrain. You can see enemies before they see you.

once, and the threat will not be raised, while the rewards stay minimal. This means there's never a side-quest that's not worth taking, as time spent away from the main storyline is always worth it. Even once you have all the items you need.

The ambition and choice stretches to character selection too. Nords, Redguards, Dark Elves and Bretons are a handful of characters with very different abilities across the board – some will be good at winning people over with their charm, others will be good at conjuring demons to fight for them, most will be good at melee attacking but with different weapons from warhammers to blades. It sounds like a typical My Very First RPG scenario, but rarely has a game been so distinct in the differences between the classes and the choices open to the player. Those picking an Orc but going for stealth will naturally find remaining hidden much harder, and will eventually drift back to the natural heavy armour, heavy weapons abilities of the Orc race. However, if you're stubborn, you can persist with stealth until your abilities evolve to match those of a thief. How you play dictates how your character is moulded throughout. While the original *Morrowind* tended to favour melee classes over magical classes, the choices in *Oblivion* seem much more balanced this time around with those going down the route of playing as a thief or mage finding more reward for their efforts.

The only presence dictating your in-game choices are the laws of the towns themselves, sticking to the 'thou shall not steal, thou shall not kill' laws of common sense. Even then, there are ways to circumvent these laws to do as you please: paying off the guards through the Thieves Guild, invisibility spells to remain hidden or simply returning to said town when you're strong enough to kill the guards, and then dishing out your own version of the law. Even better, dead bodies are dead bodies. They don't magically disappear over time. If you can't carry the Daedric Warhammer by a fallen guard, you can simply return once you've eased the burden on your inventory to find it still there. If there's another game that empowers you like this does once you've ridded a town of its city guard and they lie at your feet, lifeless, we'd like to see it.

Some will already have been down this road with *Morrowind*, a game whose size nearly choked the original Xbox but just about managed to survive the console's technical limitations. *Oblivion* also finds itself hampered in places as the frame-rate occasionally chugs and wheezes under the vast demands, but overall it does a far better job of taming this huge, free-roaming beast and bringing it under control. That's not the biggest

ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

REAL LIFE

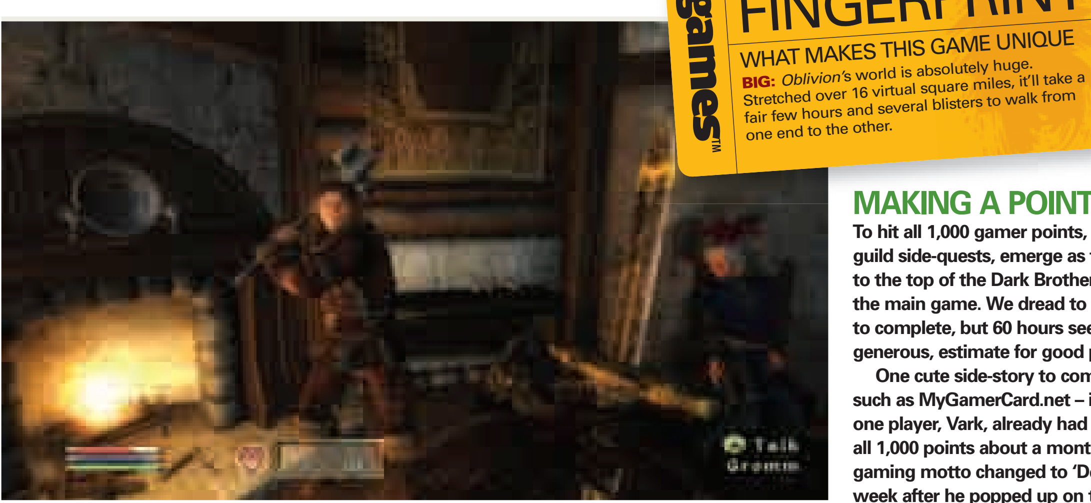
FAQs

Q. BUT I DON'T LIKE RPGS...
It matters not. *Oblivion* might be steeped in RPG tradition, but will win you over with its staggering ambition and scale.

Q. ISN'T IT BORING?
Not at all. You have enough skills and spells to keep you playing through the initial lull until you're caught in *Oblivion*'s vice-like grip.

Q. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?
The main quest will probably be around 40 hours, if you're quick. To find everything? Jesus, now you're asking…

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
BIG: *Oblivion's* world is absolutely huge. Stretched over 16 virtual square miles, it'll take a fair few hours and several blisters to walk from one end to the other.



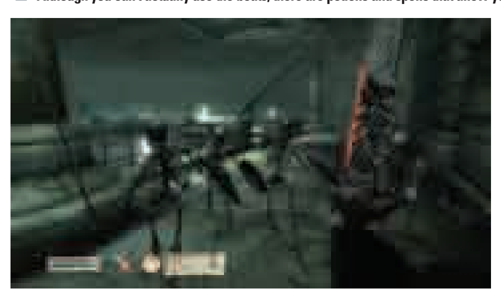
MAKING A POINT

To hit all 1,000 gamer points, you have to complete all the guild side-quests, emerge as the Arena champion and rise to the top of the Dark Brotherhood as well as completing the main game. We dread to think how long it will take to complete, but 60 hours seems a fair, if somewhat generous, estimate for good players.

One cute side-story to come from this is thanks to sites such as MyGamerCard.net – it was soon discovered that one player, Vark, already had the game and bled it dry of all 1,000 points about a month before its retail release. His gaming motto changed to 'Developer. Stop asking' about a week after he popped up on the Xbox Live radar.



Although you can't actually use the boats, there are potions and spells that allow you to walk on water.





TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

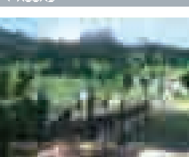
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 MINS



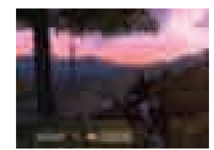
Tunnels. Rats. Darkness. Patrick Stewart talking nonsense about the Amulet Of Kings. We don't know what's happening yet, but we'd like to get out of these tunnels soon.

7 HOURS



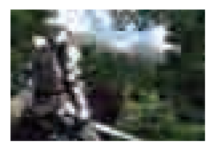
Aha! Sunlight! Open fields. Ruins in front of us; Imperial City behind us, and a ton of choices. We head to Imperial City to start mingling, killing some wolves on the way.

5 DAYS



We can summon spider guards to escort us through the countryside, become invisible, open the toughest locks using spells, and conjure up warlords to fight from Oblivion.

PC [£34.99]



Almost identical bar some slight differences to the front-end and in-game menu to accommodate the mouse set-up. Future content also seems more likely for *Oblivion* given that the PC *Morrowind* received several updates and expansion packs.

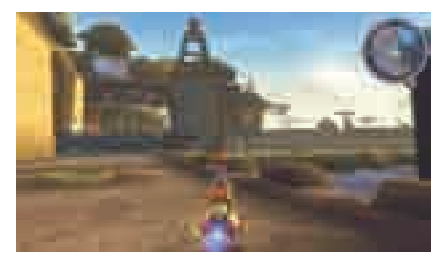
difference, though. Rather, it's that *Oblivion* is far quicker off the mark when sinking its teeth into you. Unlike *Morrowind*, which needlessly made the opening hours frustrating thanks to swords passing through creatures if your level wasn't high enough to register a hit, *Oblivion* makes far more sense. Strike flesh with steel and, well, you strike flesh with steel. There's an actual connection and it's easier to find your legs as the combat is more clearly defined, leaving you free to refine your fighting technique as soon as you fight the first rats in the prison tunnels. You're given a few abilities to tide you over until you scramble your way up the character development and these are more than enough to get you used to the intricacies of the combat system. After that, it's just a case of learning how to integrate the hotkeys into your fighting, and deciding which eight spells or weapons would serve you best in battle – not tricky at all and it certainly beats swords passing through rats.

Add to that the accessibility that *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* lacked and there are very few holes left for naysayers to pick at. The AI does have some bizarre *Where's Wally* moments as it runs around you unable to get a lock on your position, but moments like these are the exception, not the rule. The loading times as you ride through the countryside can stutter and trip you up, but it's a small price to pay for 16 square virtual miles. The lack of handholding at the start will confuse some, but this can easily be interpreted as a strength rather than a weakness. This leaves *Oblivion* as arguably the first essential Xbox 360 title. It's heavily steeped in RPG tradition, however, its appeal stretches far beyond the hardcore RPG demographic thanks to its ease of play, boundless ambition and focused attention to detail. Perhaps the only question that now remains is why it took so long for Xbox 360 to finally get its first, truly great game.

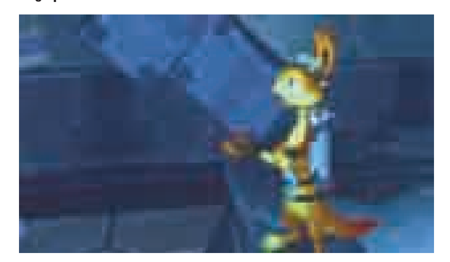


"OBLIVION'S APPEAL STRETCHES BEYOND THE HARDCORE RPG DEMOGRAPHIC THANKS TO ITS EASE OF PLAY AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL"





Expansive environments, like the ones featured in *Daxter*, mark a new graphical benchmark for PSP titles.



The little rodent is as sarcastic as ever, and his cohorts find him just as irritating as we do.



Daxter can upgrade his bug spray sporadically throughout the game. Here, he unleashes fiery hell on the insect minions.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Ready At Dawn

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

DAXTER

JAK'S IRRITATING SIDEKICK STEPS OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Platform games are stuck in a time warp. Not since 1996, and the magnificent *Super Mario 64*, has there been an example of the genre that has really made people stand to attention. The most recent generation has brought us the relative delights of Jak, Ratchet and co, but there's an unavoidable feeling that platforming is becoming a lost art, losing its very essence in favour of three dimensional adventuring and the trudgery of item collection.

With *Daxter*, Sony and Ready At Dawn seem keen to reclaim the spirit of the platform game. It's a title littered with tense jumping sections and split-second timing, always challenging the dexterity of the player without resorting to *Prince Of Persia*-style rewinds or wall runs. It's an unabashedly character-driven, Pixar-inspired romp that positively glows from the PSPs screen with the kind of production values rarely seen in handheld games.

Firing up *Daxter's* solo adventure for the first time is quite an astonishing experience. Even in the light of *GTA* and *WipEout Pure*, Ready At Dawn's effort stands tall as the finest looking game on the system, featuring city skylines bustling with airborne traffic, real-time lighting that would sit comfortably on the PS2, and a sense of style and character that the genre usually lacks. The diminutive hero himself is brimming with personality, and the supporting cast mocks his aggravating character traits amusingly, while the scripting and cut-scenes are up to the series' usual high standards.

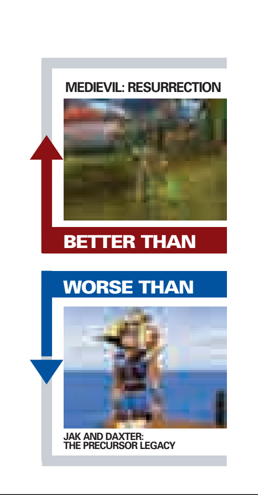
The aforementioned reclamation of the platforming ethos is undoubtedly at *Daxter's* core, and despite some nicely realised vehicle sections and the occasional boss battle, the game jumps from one ledge-leaping set piece to the next. It gives the adventure a distinctly old-school, youthful charm – quite refreshing in a climate of steampunk and ultra-violence.

For a family-orientated platform adventure, *Daxter* comes as an extremely pleasant surprise. Tight design, strong characterisation and mischievous exuberance litter a game whose only downfall is an inevitable descent into repetitiveness. As much as the developer has tried to offer varied gameplay and tone at every opportunity, there's only so much hopping and bug swatting one rodent can do before things become noticeably tiresome.

Still, handheld gaming is designed for brief sessions and, in bite-sized chunks, *Daxter* is a very tasty prospect. A welcome return to form for everyone's favourite loud-mouthed otter/weasel creature.

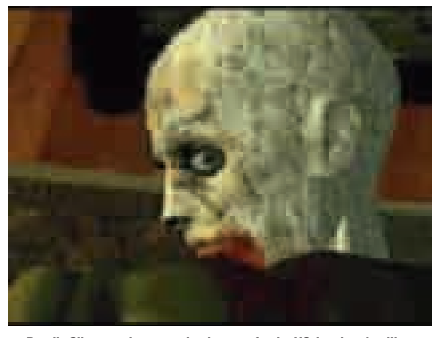
VERDICT 7/10
PRETTY, WELL DESIGNED AND ENTERTAINING

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
Two players can battle over Wi-Fi in a *Pokémon Coliseum*-style 'bug battle'. Daxter finds assorted creatures hidden on each of the levels, and they can be taken into war against other PSP owners.





Ever wanted to stab wildly at a zombie using your own hand? Now you can, repeatedly. Bit dull, isn't it?



Deadly Silence arrives completely uncut for the US, but there's still no word on whether the UK version will receive the same treatment.



Having the map permanently on the top screen is useful but, ultimately, quite ugly. Perhaps an eerie artwork view would have been better.

RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE

DON'T OPEN… THAT DOOR

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Videogame developers and publishers very rarely pay homage to their past works, but the *Resident Evil* series has been treated somewhat differently over the years. This, the original *Resident Evil*, helped to define a genre and a console generation, and is now appearing in its fourth separate guise (after a director's cut and a GameCube remake), but here's the burning question: is it still relevant?

Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is yes. Despite its archaic control method, structure and ridiculous but utterly fantastic voice acting, the game's innate charm and mixture of overbearing tension and fear still works as well today as it did back in 1996. Anyone familiar with the PSOne game will have no trouble tearing through *Deadly Silence's* Classic mode, and will be pleased to see that the infamous creaking door animations are now skippable, and Capcom has cleverly included the 180-degree spin to aid movement around the pre-rendered hallways.



So, Classic mode is a pleasing conversion restored in all its former glory (even featuring the intro movie which can only be described as seminal), but the DS-specific Rebirth is where fans of the series will spend most of their time. Again, it's *Resident Evil 1*, but a damned sight harder and with a smattering of touch screen features firmly shoehorned in to justify the choice of format. The most obvious and instant of these comes in the form of a knife-slashing mini-game whereby upon entering a room the camera will switch to first-person and the player must make slicing motions on the touch screen in order to fend off the encroaching zombie hordes. It's entertaining enough and offers an unexpected fright when entering a previously unguarded room, but four or five appearances is enough for it to become rather tiresome. Some *Onimusha*-style puzzle boxes, microphone games and a touch screen inventory are not enough to warrant the DS subtitle, and prove more of a distraction than a welcome inclusion.

For those new to the game, or fans willing to revisit *Raccoon City* in all its former glory, however, *Resident Evil DS* is largely faultless. Undoubtedly, it has been eclipsed by far superior examples of the genre (*Resident Evil 4* being the most obvious), but for a handheld title *Deadly Silence* is a solid achievement. Some ten years on, paying a second (or third, or fourth!) visit to one of videogaming's crowning achievements is a pleasant exercise in nostalgia, and a worthwhile gaming experience in itself. The quicker developers stop insisting on cramming touch screen elements where they're not wanted, though, the better.

games™ ENHANCED

OPEN THAT DOOR: A swift button press is all it takes to get rid of those door animations.
HACKENSLASH: Knife zombies in the head in a trite touch screen mini-game.



VERDICT 7/10
STILL A CLASSIC, BUT MINI-GAMES THREATEN TO SPOIL IT

RESIDENT EVIL



JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



RESIDENT EVIL 4

THE GODFATHER



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, PC, PSP, Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

AN OFFER YOU CAN REFUSE?

There's a scene at the end of Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* in which an unseen assailant murders a chauffeur. This is hardly unusual for film noir, but the scene remains famous for one reason – we never find out who did it. Raymond Chandler, on whose book the film is based, admitted that the plot had got the better of him and even he didn't know whom the culprit was. Such an oversight would be the death of a lesser movie, but few who watch *The Big Sleep* notice the mistake. The reason? Verisimilitude.

In film, it's impossible to explain everything. Characters interact, plot points are resolved but, due to time restrictions, some elements are inevitably left unexplained. Whether these details pose a problem for the audience is down to the creation of a coherent on-screen reality – the creation of verisimilitude. If a movie has a strong sense of reality, liberties can be taken without sacrificing believability. This is the secret of *The Big Sleep* where murder, vice, and corruption are the norm. The killing of the chauffeur fits that reality perfectly, and so the identity of the assailant becomes insignificant.

Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* is set in a world of similarly corrupt values, and it too is riddled with unanswered questions offset by the film's potent atmosphere. Who cut off the horse's head? Who planted the gun in the toilet for Michael? EA's latest endeavour seeks to provide the answers.

The Godfather doesn't grant you control of the film's characters, nor do you simply re-enact the narrative. Rather, you inhabit the world of the movie while your story intersects it, thereby extending the universe of the movie instead of imitating it. This also demands that the look and themes of the film are perfectly captured. How can the game be considered part of the film's reality unless it creates the sense of… well, it's our old friend verisimilitude again.

You assume control of a low-level hood and work your way into the good graces of Don Corleone while trying to take over the rackets and strongholds of rival families. Roaming freely, you participate in the story and sub-missions, earning money and respect. Games of this type are so often compared with *GTA* that the observation has become glib, but the structure of *The Godfather* owes so much to its influence that it is basically inevitable. The good news is that, superficially, EA has done a fine job – the plot is compelling, the environment is evocative, and the combat is



games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

VOICES: One of the finest ensembles in cinema history makes a belated return.

EXPANSION: It attempts to expand upon the film narrative, rather than simply repeat it.

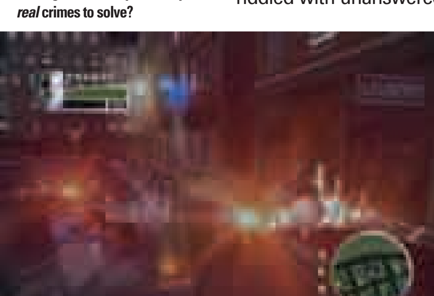
FAQs

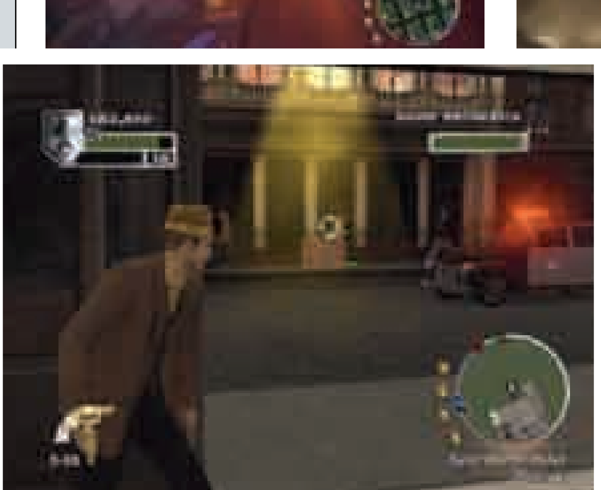
Q. FAST CARS?
No, while every vehicle can be driven, the selection is limited and the speed is low.

Q. BIG GUNS?
Everything from pistols to shotguns to dynamite. We recommend the Tommy gun.

Q. LOOSE WOMEN?
Here and there. You can flirt and playfully pinch their arses, but the fun stops there.

All this fuss for a broken rear headlight. Don't they have any *real* crimes to solve?







The Godfather attempts to mix the soul of the movie with modern videogame pyrotechnics.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Much has been made of the voice talent in *The Godfather*, and rightly so. Robert Duvall and James Caan reprise their roles as Tom Hagen and Sonny Corleone, while the real boon is Marlon Brando's work as Don Vito (he died in 2004 soon after the game was completed). Such celebrity would normally signal grand things, or at least grand pay-cheques, but opinion on the project was divided. Al Pacino declined to return as the troubled Michael, while Francis Ford Coppola dismissed the very concept as preposterous, claiming that he was not consulted by EA at any stage during development.



We're sure that crashing into a dustbin shouldn't create such chaos.



Didn't your mother ever tell you never to stand too close to an exploding car? It's an accident waiting to happen.

satisfying. But while *GTA* reveals new levels of depth as you progress, extended play here strips away the gloss, revealing the flaws.

A game of this length demands variety, and this is where *The Godfather* fails. Missions focus on driving and shooting, which is fun initially, but soon becomes tiresome. This may not have been a problem had the sub-missions provided some relief, but they don't and before long you'll never want to see a shopkeeper again, let alone extort money from one. The environment holds similar problems. What seems an expansive facsimile of Thirties New York reveals itself as far too rigid – vast oceans of nothing slather the map, and buildings vary little from place to place.

As flaws reveal themselves it becomes clear that *The Godfather's* most endearing qualities originate in the film. That music, those actors, the classic scene: they all conjure up memories, and while the game is good in its own right it never captures the atmosphere that Nino Rota's score or Don Corleone's guttural tones so effortlessly evoke. Coppola's movie is an epic tale of loss and regret – the corruption of Michael Corleone's soul, the foul reality of the American dream – and EA has turned it into a story about gain. Whereas the motive of violence was once to illustrate Michael's downward spiral, here it is merely a tool with which to boost your bank balance.

For devotees of the film, the game is both satisfyingly nostalgic and regrettably immature. Many, who haven't seen the film, will be free from prejudice but will still get a jolt from the sight of Brando or a horse's head, and perhaps this is where the game will find its own devotees. This may be the consequence of converting a cinematic work of art into a medium that seldom seems capable of achieving such emotion and intellect. Games can do cars, guns, bombs and broads, but they struggle with soul.



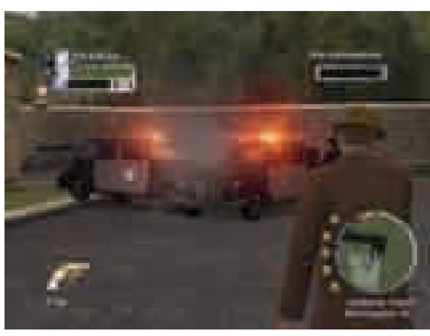
VERDICT 6/10

A GOOD ATTEMPT, BUT IT'S NO MASTERPIECE

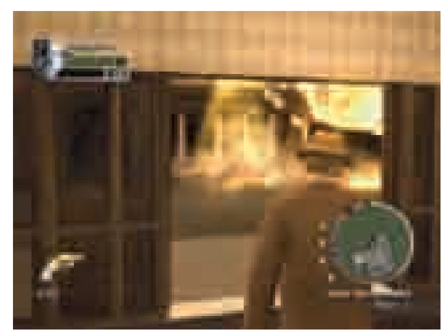




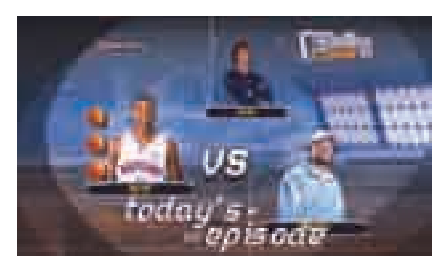
Earn money by threatening innocent old ladies with your crude insults.



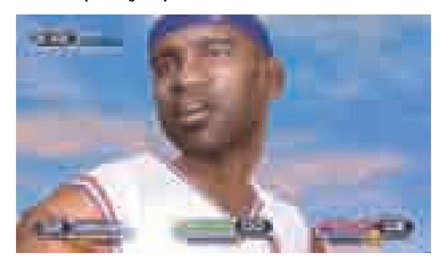
There's never a cop around when you need one, then two arrive at once.



"I did ask for a room with an interesting view, but this is ridiculous."



The Create-A-Player mode allows you to build people that look absolutely nothing like you.



Even with an excruciating looking broken neck, he continues to 'ball' – there's a lesson to us all, there.



NBA Ballers: Rebound features one vs one vs one games, which only adds to the mayhem.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Backbone

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

NBA BALLERS: REBOUND

"IT'S HARD WORK MAKING SOMETHING THIS PRETTY LOOK LIKE A CHUMP… OR A GEEK"

It's a crying shame that most people in this country will take one look at *NBA Ballers: Rebound*'s box art and turn their noses up; there appears to be an inherent dislike for anything urban or, dare we say it, 'street' in British videogame culture. Those who choose to judge a book by its cover will be missing out on a very unique sports title that borrows from the beat-'em-up genre just as much as it cribs from *NBA Jam*.

Anyone who spent time with the PlayStation2 and Xbox original will be in familiar territory; *Rebound* alters very little from its successful formula of one-on-one trick-based streetball. Matches are split into three rounds: to win a round, you must score more than ten points before your opponent, and then it's simply best two out of three. It's an uncomplicated structure that allows players to concentrate on their 'game'.

The beauty of *Ballers* is that it concentrates on the most tense and exciting part of basketball – the final moments of a game. Match-ups are two minutes in length but can be finished in under 60 seconds, making every single point scored crucial. The key to victory lies in careful use of tricks, turbo (or 'juice') and tenacious defence; timing is everything and the difference between winning and losing can come down to a split-second press of the block command or a beautifully timed spin move, not dissimilar to a tight bout of *Street Fighter*.

As you get to grips with the trick system and begin throwing down some serious dunks, entering into the Career mode – or Rags to Riches as it's called – allows *Rebound* to showcase its amusing storyline of a young (user-created) streetballer who takes on professional players for reality television. It's a solid and entertaining single-player experience, but the constant barrage of identikit match-ups can tend to become far too tiresome after a while. *NBA Ballers: Rebound* is best played in short bursts – one or two matches at a time – perfect fare for the PSP.

With a wide selection of moves and dunks (both signature and fabricated), exquisitely animated character models and enthusiastic commentary provided by the dreadlocked Supernatural MC, *NBA Ballers: Rebound* is difficult to actually fault – unless you plan to play for more than 30 minutes. It's hardly pushing back the boundaries of portable gaming, but for a diverting dip into the excesses of the urban American dream, you could ask for little more, really.

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
CHECK THE BALL: Take on another PSP owner over ad hoc Wi-Fi.
HOOK SHOT: Use your created ballers in multi-player to find out who's best.

NBA STREET SHOWDOWN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



NBA 2K6



VERDICT 7/10
A FINE, IF LIMITED, PACKAGE. GREAT HANDHELD FARE

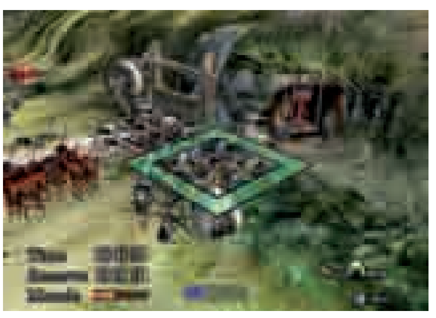

eMag



Try barking orders at your men when morale is low and they'll disobey you like this. And they say the military do what they're told…



Ringing the bell with the Odama at certain points grants you a Heavenly Odama. You can use this to recruit fresh troops from the enemy.

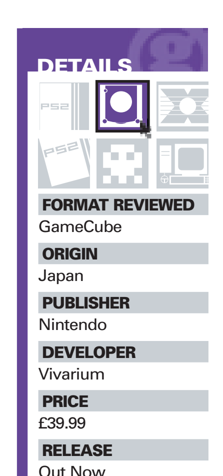


Ah, rice balls… apparently, the only thing that will stop enemy soldiers attacking you. Where's a McDonalds march-thru when you need it?

ODAMA

IT'S TRUE – HISTORY REALLY ISN'T FUN





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Vivarium

PRICE
£39.99

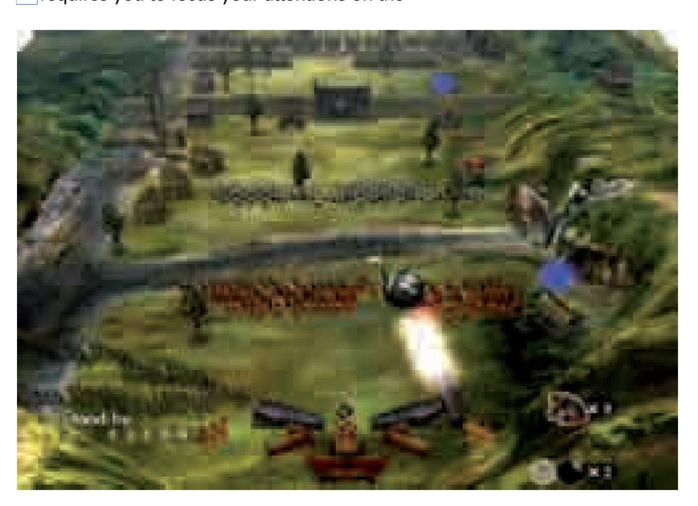
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

While we don't claim to be experts, we do know a thing or two about feudal Japan and its history. We've read a few books. We've played *Dynasty Warriors* and *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*. Heck, we've even seen enough Akira Kurosawa films, episodes of *Monkey* and that Tom Cruise atrocity, *The Last Samurai*. But a giant steel ball rolling around the 16th Century Japanese landscape, increasing the morale of the soldiers as it crushes their foes and generally decimates the local countryside? That's a new one on us. And yet, you'd be hard pressed not to believe it, considering the convincing tale of blood, honour and revenge *Odama* weaves through its opening… from the authentic-styled scrollwork covered in art to the booming Japanese voice narrating the whole thing, it's an attention to detail that many games today lack.

Of course, all that authenticity soon comes to naught once you start the game simply because it doesn't mean a thing to the gameplay – the action is as ludicrous as it is overly complicated, as fiddly as it is uncontrollable, and as far away from the elegant subtlety of Japanese art as you're going to get. It's not that we can't appreciate what *Odama* is doing because, to be fair, it's creative and interesting enough to sound like a viable prospect. No, it's Nintendo's lack of publicity for the game that's been the biggest injustice here, as *Odama*'s much more than that. A combination of pinball, action and military strategy, the game's initial concept is actually a real gem… until the unmitigated swearing and cursing begins, at least.

Admittedly, a significant portion of the game requires you to focus your attentions on the

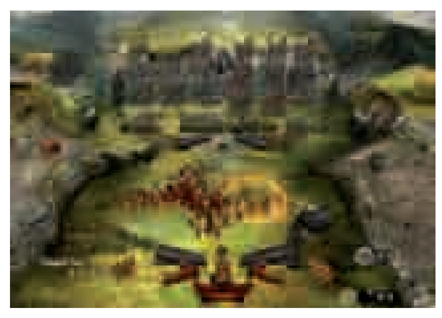


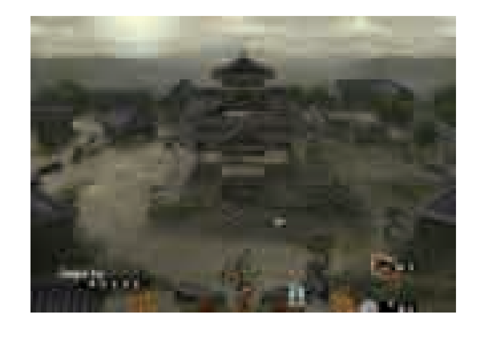


This is the Ninten Bell – you need to keep troops around it to stop it from being pushed back, but then you can't hit it yourself. Stupid.

DUM-DUM, DUM-DUM… DUMMM

Morale is important in *Odama*; it's the key factor to driving your men forward because low morale means they won't listen to your orders (not that they do anyway). Pretty much everything you do can lower morale: flattening your own men with the Odama (virtually impossible to avoid 90 per cent of the time), having your bell pushed back by the enemy (again, virtually impossible to avoid when they won't stop coming), and even shouting the wrong order can ruin everything. Only by sending in more troops or feeding them rice balls (yes, rice balls) can morale be restored.





movement of the Odama itself; the heavy steel sphere that you bat around the environment with all the control of… well, a heavy steel sphere, albeit one that seems to have its own grasp of physics above and beyond our own. However, there's also the small matter of issuing orders to your troops – pointy-legged little men that look like they'd blow away in a light gale – and leading your prized treasure, a giant bell known as the Ninten Bell (and yes, your men are called the Ninten-do… really) across each map to its destination at the far end.

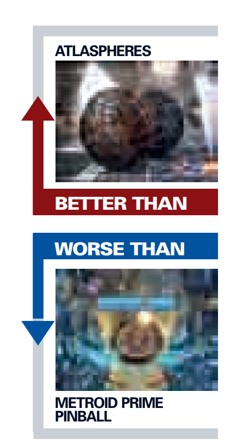
This you do through a combination of hitting targets with the Odama – closing floodgates to drain rivers, lowering bridges and generally smashing anything that stands in your way – and shouting into the microphone that comes with the game. In this way, you can order your men to protect the bell, attack enemy troops, press forward or move back and even rally round objects that can help you progress or take short cuts through the levels… it really is quite clever. Or, at least, it would be if it worked; trying to send your men left then watching them scurry right, or yelling 'Press forward!' repeatedly and seeing everyone ignore you (whether their morale is low or not) is more than enough to bring forth other less appropriate words that have as little effect on your men as the real commands.

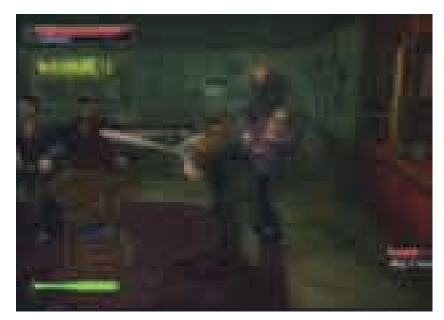
Unfortunately, this is just one small part of a far bigger problem with *Odama*, which is that it's far too complicated for its own good. Having to keep your eye on about four things at once gets incredibly distracting; you can't even try to put the Odama where you need it without your own men blindly moving in the way, leaving you to mow them down. You can't send your troops to rally around key items without leaving the bell unprotected, and you can't push the bell in the right direction without mis-hitting the Odama. You can lose in many ways, and the fact that you don't have much control over anything makes things even worse. Enemy attacks on your base freeze the flippers, making saving the Odama impossible… but if you're using the Odama to clear the landscape and hit targets as you should, it's impossible to successfully fend them off. Troops die at an alarming rate – especially when you flatten them with the Odama – so the bell continually gets pushed back by never-ending streams of enemies until it disappears off the bottom. Running out of morale, running out of troops, running out of time… it all mounts up, but not in a good way.

And so, we can only come to one conclusion here: *Odama* really isn't any fun to play. At all. In fact, just like many other sub-par military strategy games, it's far more work than a game should be. The fact that it also looks absolutely terrible – more like an N64 game than one that deserves to be on the GameCube – should be the bitter icing on a particularly stale cake, but to berate it more for that would just be rubbing it in. Whether you want a military simulation or a pinball game, there are far better examples of both out there.

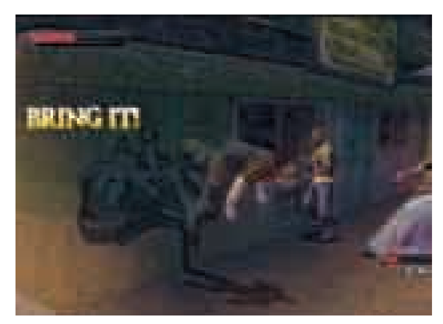


VERDICT 3/10
ODAMA? OH… DAMN IT

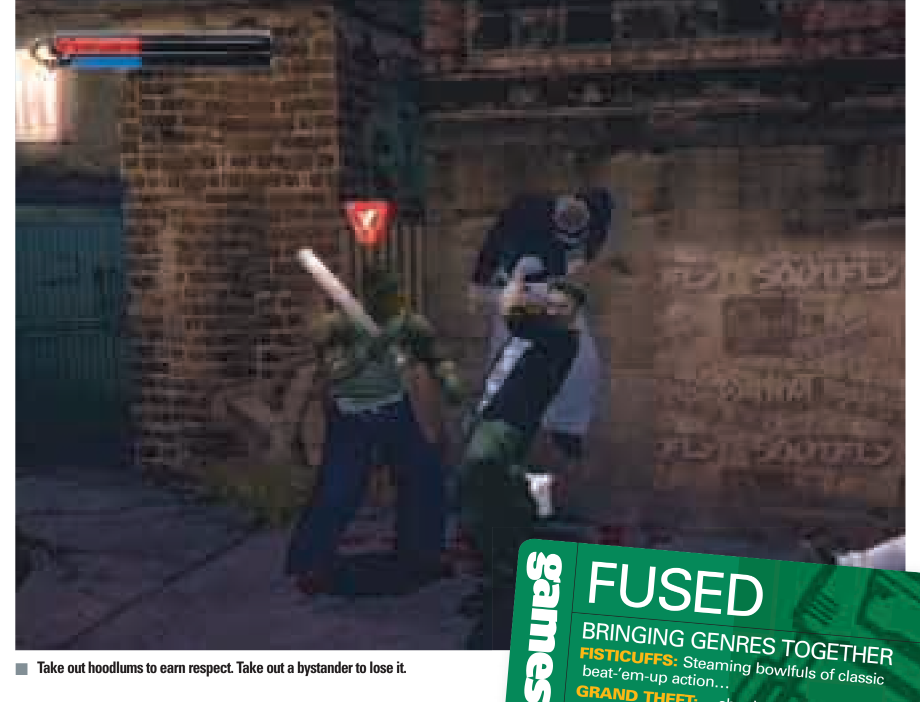




"Mr Gangster, say hello to my big, wooden friend."



Build up your Instinct to execute acrobatic special moves.



Take out hoodlums to earn respect. Take out a bystander to lose it.

games™ **FUSED**

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

FISTICUFFS: Steaming bowlfuls of classic beat-'em-up action…

GRAND THEFT: …shoehorned into dodgy, *GTA*-style puzzle solving.

THE FINAL FIGHT? WE HOPE SO

FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PS2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

If something's worth doing, it's worth doing right – a piece of advice drilled into us from an early age, and one that seems to have missed Capcom by a country mile. In theory, a modern update of the classic beat-'em-up *Final Fight* seems like a good idea. In reality, it's the very definition of half-assed. So erase those memories of halcyon days spent nurturing your arthritis with the original coin-op, because *Streetwise* does it no kind of justice.

Streetwise proposes to meld elements of the original with the free-roaming variety of *GTA*. Lofty ambitions, to be sure, but the resulting game is so full of holes and bereft of humour that it quickly becomes a chore to play. The arena itself, Metro City, is divided into several sub-sections, each of which is far too small to lay claim to anything like freedom. Talking to bystanders allows you access to mini-games. From playing darts to killing cockroaches, the games range from acceptable to irritating, and far too often fall under the latter.

The actual fighting is the game's saving grace. You can use your money to purchase new moves and there's an abundance of lowlifes and drug-addicts to practice them on. As your ability improves, you are awarded Instinct which can be used during skirmishes to unlock powerful combinations and counter moves. There's just enough variety to keep the action from becoming boring, but any achievement is undermined by the camera which, without your careful control, adopts a life of its own.

Streetwise is the latest in a series of brawlers that try so hard to be 'urban' you can virtually hear them straining. It's there in the hip-hop soundtrack and it's there in the pimps that line the streets. The characters have names like Handsome Bob, Lou the Skin and Gummy Joe – well, maybe not the last one – but even this flimsy pretence eventually collapses under the increasing absurdity of the protracted plot.

Small consolation arrives in the form of cameos from the original characters. This could have evoked fantastic feelings of nostalgia, but against this backdrop it merely comes across as pandering to the audience. Like a failed comedian resorting to a catchphrase for cheap laughs, it's an act of desperation. After enough time spent playing *Streetwise*, you could convince yourself it was the only reason the game was made.

VERDICT 4/10

WISE MAN SAY: 'DON'T SCREW WITH A CLASSIC'




eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Genius Sonority

PRICE
$34.99

RELEASE
28 April (Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

POKÉMON TROZEI!

GET IN LINE, DAMMIT

A better name for *Pokémon Trozei!* – or *Pokémon Link* as it is to be known in Europe – would be 'Pokémon Everywhere'. It will break your brain. Like *Zoo Keeper*, extended play has serious repercussions on your mental health – you'll be seeing lines of Dunsparce and Wooper everywhere you look (unless you're already dangerously Pokémon-obsessive, in which case you probably see dancing Pikachu everywhere, regardless). Thankfully, like *Pokémon Puzzle League* and *Pokémon Snap*, *Trozei* is far from a soulless cash-in (we're holding out for 'Pokémon Baseball'); its twist on the *Zoo Keeper* formula genuinely brings something new to the table, and the Pokémon branding is complementary rather than central to its innate appeal.



Most Pokémon turn up all the time – there are occasional one-offs that need to be captured in a specific way to complete the Trozei list.

As in *Zoo Keeper*, the aim here is to stack different icons into lines. Four in a line triggers a Trozei Chance, which gives you a limited amount of time to create a line of three, then as many lines of two as you can before having to start again with a line of four. All-purpose Ditto drop from the top of the screen to reward skilful play and facilitate clearing the screen – joining two non-identical Pokémon with a Ditto when the screen is near empty becomes an essential technique later on in the game's tragically short-lived Adventure mode. Pokémon fall continuously from the top of the screen, and you can move rows down and to either side (but not up) which necessitates careful planning and keeping an eye on the top screen, where new Pokémon appear. There is always a way to clear the screen entirely at any given point, but there are also several hundred ways not to – the skill in *Trozei* is waiting long enough to trigger a massive chain reaction without letting the screens become overwhelmed with colourful characters.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

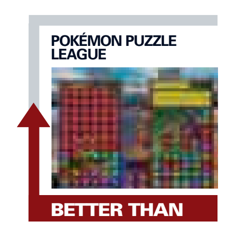
ALL THE POKÉMON: There are hundreds waiting to be stacked up in Adventure mode. Getting them all is no small task, but the catch-'em-all mentality is likely to get the better of you...

So the game itself is fast, reasonably original and a great deal of fun. *Trozei*'s disadvantage is its complete lack of modes. It has only a very short Adventure mode and an Endless mode, and although you can play with a friend it would have been nice to see a puzzle sequence mode or something similar to extend the game's longevity. Trozei-ing all the Pokémon will take a long time, but there's little incentive to do so unless you really are a true fanatic. Regardless, *Pokémon Trozei* is great fun, if somewhat short-lived, and *Pokémon* fans will find a lot to like in this entertaining puzzle game.



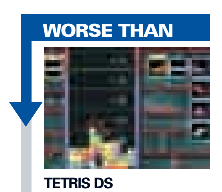
VERDICT 7/10
GREAT FUN AND SURPRISINGLY ORIGINAL

POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE

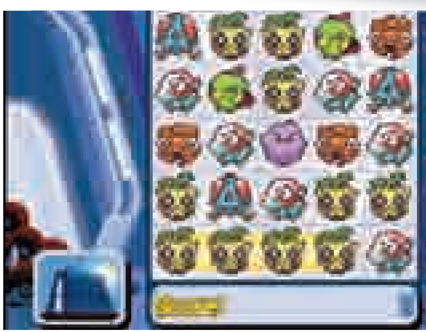


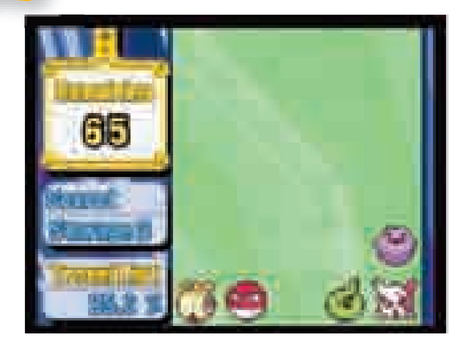
BETTER THAN

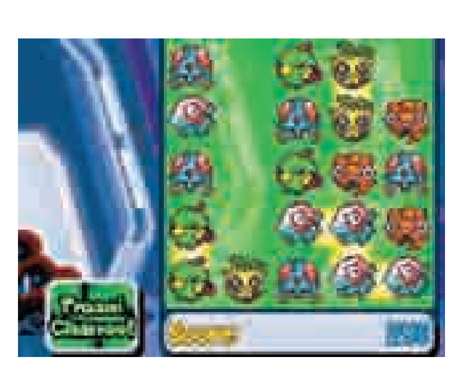
WORSE THAN



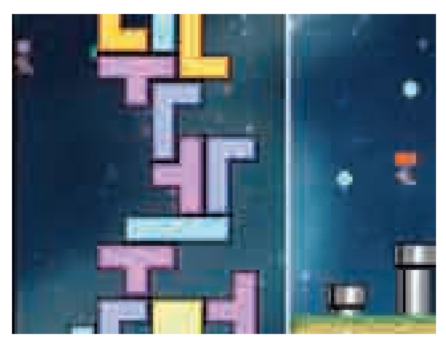
TETRIS DS



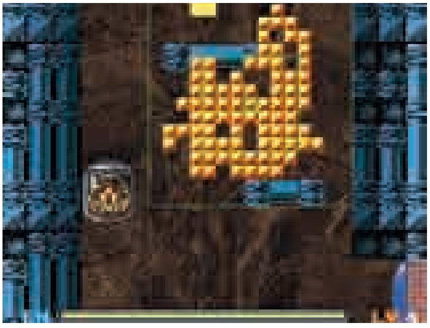




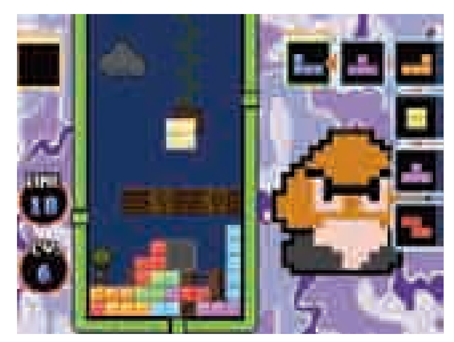
The difficulty curve is perfect – the Adventure mode's 40-odd missions are carefully graduated.



The touch puzzles work really well, although they're not exactly conventional *Tetris*.



Catch barely resembles *Tetris* at all, challenging you to build a spaceship out of falling *Tetris* bits and then making it explode. Boring after a while.



Okay, so we'd place that four-block square on the left, and then turn the next block 180° and put it over near the right.

TETRIS DS

THOSE BLOCKS JUST KEEP ON FALLING

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Russia

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

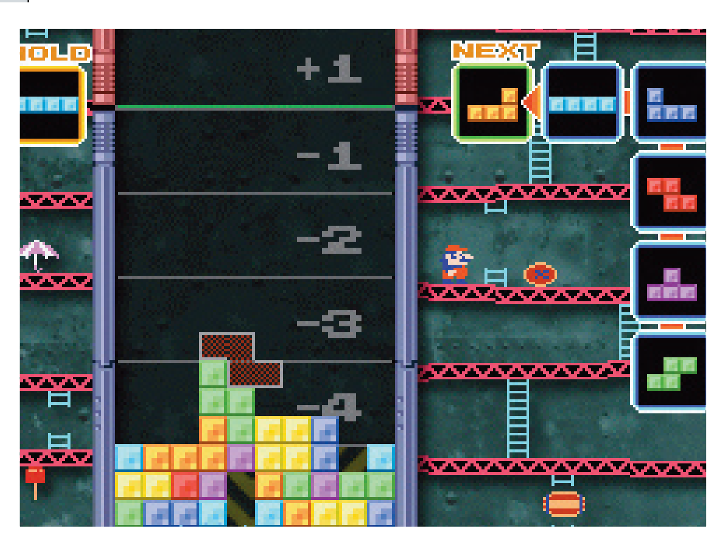
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
21 April
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-10 (2-4 Online)

If you're not the world's biggest Nintendo fan, you might want to avoid *Tetris DS*. It is saturated in 8-bit Nintendo nostalgia. The music is all from NES incarnations of *Zelda*, *Metroid*, *Donkey Kong* and *Mario* (and the slightly more obscure *Yoshi's Cookie* and *Balloon Fight*), little Nintendo characters prance around on the top screen while you play, and the whole style and presentation of the game is liberally splattered with Nintendo nonsense. Underneath its almost prohibitively nostalgia-soaked presentation, though, is one of the best incarnations of *Tetris* we've seen; a huge variety of modes, fantastic multi-player integration and its portable format put it right up there with *Tetris DX*. If you're likely to find its themed presentation appealing rather than overbearing, you'll enjoy it all the more.

Aside from a proper, authentic Standard Tetris mode, which includes Marathon, Line Clear and Vs, *Tetris DS* incorporates a variety of other, usually touch screen-based modes. Push is a variation on competitive *Tetris* where players on the top and bottom screens share the same baseline; Touch is a vaguely *Denki Blocks*-esque series of problems recognisable as *Tetris* only by the familiarity of the shapes involved; Puzzle is a series of 200 specific *Tetris*-based puzzles; Mission is normal *Tetris* with certain challenges, such as 'clear three lines at once'; and Catch, which barely resembles *Tetris* at all, is a grinding *Metroid*-themed action puzzler that is novel once but will probably never be tried again. The single-player Touch and *Tetris*-based puzzles are an especially welcome addition, giving the lone player a lot more variety than the usual straight *Tetris* marathon.



games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
JIPPED!: The game's online modes aren't nearly as impressive as the offline DS-to-DS communication options, which support up to ten players as opposed to Wi-Fi's meagre four.

Where the game really stands out, though, is in the multi-player – ten-player competitive *Tetris* is a wonderful thing, and the item integration and balancing works brilliantly. Over DS to DS download play, you can compete in most of the game's modes against upto ten other people. It's completely different to the monochrome one-on-one battles on Game Boys of old.

The only sticking point that we had with the game was the lack of customisation options for the standard *Tetris* game. You can't change the music or the backdrop, and though you can turn off the ghost shape and hard drop functions, the reserve box and annoying infinite-rotate function (whereby a piece always stays in play as long as it's being rotated) are unchangeable. It doesn't greatly affect the gameplay, however, and the multitude of other worthwhile modes make this a valuable purchase nonetheless. *Tetris DS* is an excellent puzzle game and, especially if you're into the Nintendo presentation, it's a very good value, well-constructed title.



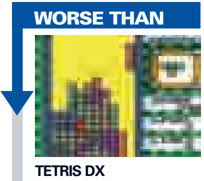
VERDICT 8/10
TETRIS, BUT TETRIS DONE WELL

TETRIS WORLDS



BETTER THAN

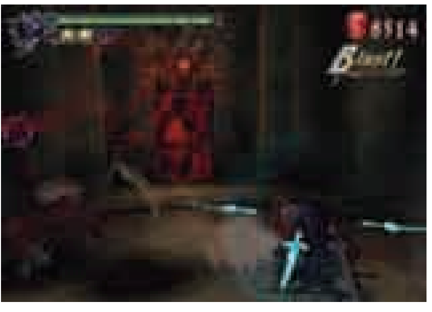
WORSE THAN

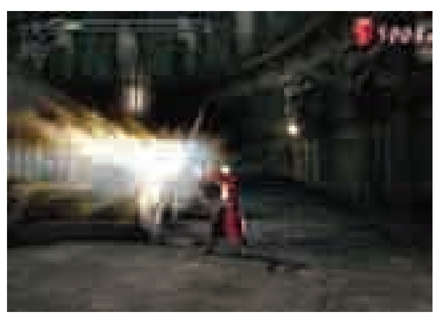


TETRIS DX



You wait all this time to cut Jester up and when you finally get the chance he's full of colourful paper. Curses.


To have a whole new set of moves for a character makes for a very special Special Edition.


Now, for the first time ever, both of the sons of Sparda can be yours. Hurrah.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING SPECIAL EDITION

IT'S THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
28 April
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Special Editions are notoriously difficult to judge. There are two views available when attempting to attach a number to a game that's already been rated in a lesser state – helpfully, neither do the job effectively. Looking at the new package as an enhanced version of the original denies a reviewer the right to give a score lower than the first because the game previously valued is here in its entirety, while assessing the title as a standalone product forces the mark down due to the bulk of the experience being a repeat of an earlier offering. There is no way of 'winning'.

With this in mind, the big number at the end of this review is purely for cosmetic purposes and anyone who complains about it is a fool. Try to imagine it's not there. In fact, a Special Edition such as this wouldn't usually even make it to review stage but, due to the copious amount of new content available and the fact that *Dante's Awakening* was one of the best titles of last year, it seemed apt that we give it adequate coverage.

Most are aware that *Devil May Cry 3* was superb. After a somewhat weak performance from the second game in the series, it was good to see a return to form. The depth of gameplay was immense with an immeasurably intricate combo system and a horde of extras available to those persistent enough to progress beyond the second boss – for anyone who missed out on that, the Special Edition is essential. It's as simple as that. The query most buyers will have is whether it's worth handing over a further £20.

This is a point that can be argued from many angles, each more needless than the last as the obvious answer is yes. The reason? Vergil is playable. Properly. We're not just talking about a blue-coated skin for the original Dante model. Vergil has his own move-set, different combat mechanics and, although notably simpler to master than his twin, has as much to offer as Dante did in the way of versatility. The fact that Vergil is devoid of any firearms, and instead relies on summoned magical swords, completely changes the way the game is played out.

That's not to say that this all-new character has his own story; Vergil essentially plays through Dante's adventure but without the cut-

FAQs

Q. IS IT REALLY WORTH PAYING OUT AGAIN?
Well, there's more new content than you'd usually find in a Special Edition.

Q. IS VERGIL BETTER THEN DANTE?
Nope, but he gives it a good try.

Q. IS IT STILL BLOODY DIFFICULT?
There's a greater range of difficulty levels, but it's still tough.

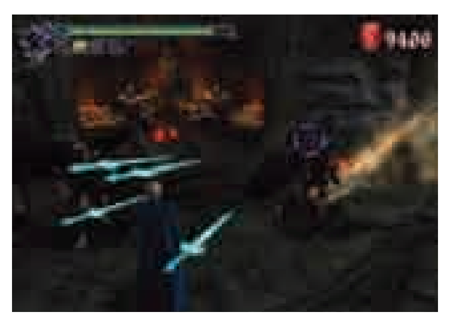




SAVING GRACE

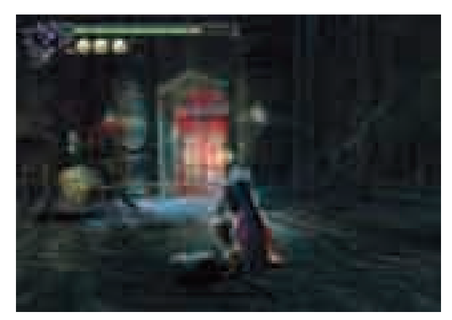
As unlikely as it may be, considering the work required to do it, the completed *DMC* save you may have achieved last year must not be deleted at any cost. In order to play as Vergil – the main reason for buying the game – you must have an existing completed Dante save on your memory card. If you don't then you'll have to play through the whole game again before you even get a sniff of Vergil. At least there's the new Easy mode.





Not as good as Ebony and Ivory, but summoning swords is quite a trick.

"Welcome to hell." Jester is as amusing as he is tough. Great.



Vergil is a little slower than Dante, so you'll have to adapt.

scenes. This is a shame, as a reasonable batch of Vergil-based cut-scenes would have highlighted the obvious effort that's gone into this.

More than making up for this is Blood Palace mode. Essentially an excuse to use any skills you've developed, and fight through hundreds of enemy-filled floors in pursuit of nothing more than a new costume and the ever-alluring high score, this presents a good opportunity to perfect combos and fight through all the enemies on offer in no particular order. That includes the rock-hard bosses and, in turn, Jester.

For those not in the know or with extremely bad memories, Jester turned up in *DMC3* a lot, but unfortunately you never got to hurt him in the way he so obviously deserved. This has changed for the Special Edition and he will now appear quite frequently, bleed confetti, and use a big ball to kill you lots. It's yet another element that makes this version that bit more appealing, and when teamed with the different gameplay speeds and mass of new costumes, artwork and videos on offer, it becomes clear that this is that little bit more 'special' than most repackaged games that come emblazoned with the word.

Ultimately, whether you make a purchase or not will be influenced by your feelings about the franchise, how much you liked the game the first time round, and whether you have a spare £20. If you hated *DMC3* then you're not going to like this as it's the same. If you've never heard of the series then we strongly recommend picking this up over the standard issue package as it has more content, and if you've seen everything the title had to offer previously, it comes down to how much you care about playing as Vergil and hitting Jester with a sword. Whichever way you look at it, it's a great game and we'd recommend it to anyone. It got an eight before; and now, just to fill that space at the bottom, it'll get eight again.

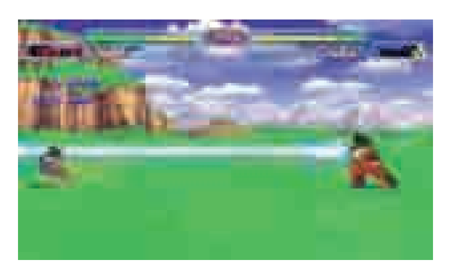




games™ CONNECTED

FRIENDLY FIREBALLS

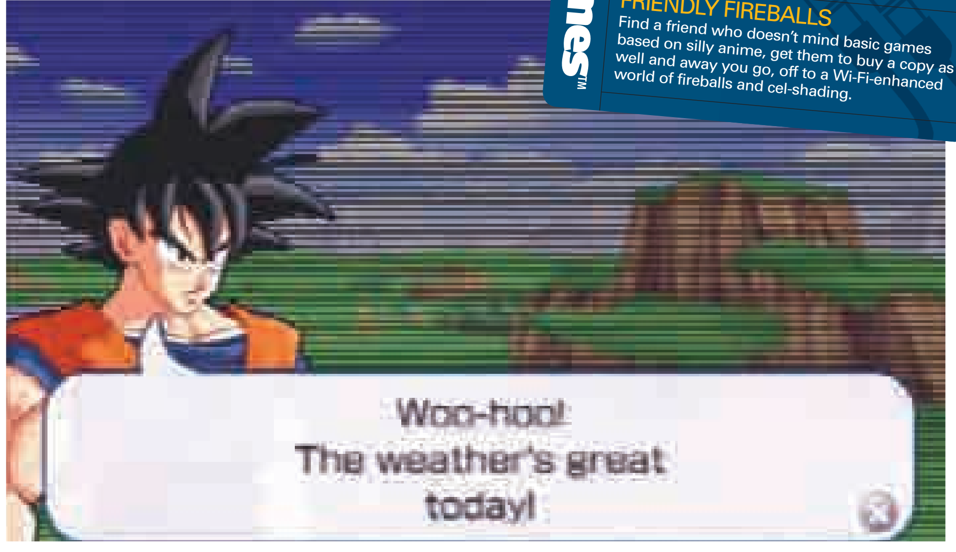
Find a friend who doesn't mind basic games based on silly anime, get them to buy a copy as well and away you go, off to a Wi-Fi-enhanced world of fireballs and cel-shading.



Ooh look, a fireball! So long as a beat-'em-up has lots of these, it'll always be good. Possibly.

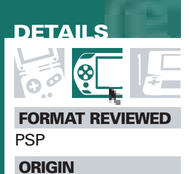


This is Piccolo. He's bad-ass. He once destroyed the moon. Oh, hell yeah.



Honestly, the amount of silly dialogue you have to put up with in Story mode is like a night down the pub with the games™ team.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Dimps

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

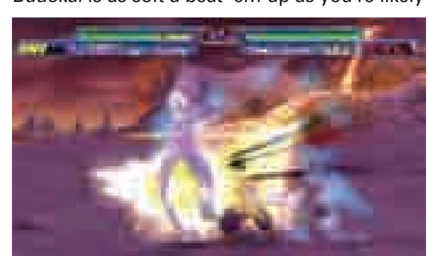
DRAGONBALL Z: Shin Budokai

NOTHING LIKE THE PREVIOUS ONES IN THE SERIES. NOPE. NOT AT ALL



D*ragonBall* is an odd thing. Created by the same Toriyama chap responsible for the character designs of *Dragon Quest VIII*, it was a manga that started off as a story about life-saving DragonBalls and became a silly anime about ridiculous fireball-heavy fights amidst superhero soap operas that are so bad they're nearly funny. Typically, this makes it fodder for run-of-the-mill beat-'em-ups made by developers with no imagination. The question here is has Dimps bucked the trend with the latest in its *Budokai* series? Miraculously, yes, it has.

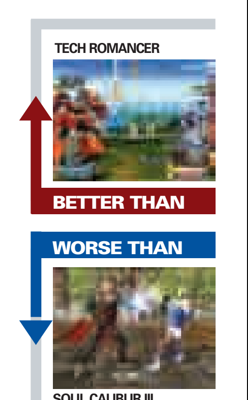
Only joking. Of course it hasn't, we just wanted you to get to the next paragraph without thinking you're about to read another review of a game that's just too similar to others in the series. Nope, *DragonBall Z: Shin Budokai* is as soft a beat-'em-up as you're likely to find and, worse still, one that offers nothing more than the previous games, aside from the fact that it's on a portable console. The combat is hideously limited, each bout essentially a repeat of the last, with you almost ritually charging up your power bar to unleash yet another over-sized fireball before moving in for a quick punch-and-kick combo. Sure, it's slightly different in Story mode with your health altered every so often to make it more of a challenge, but then you have to put up with incredible amounts of between-fight dialogue that demands you furiously tap X to scroll through it. This is where Dimps has tried to force feed the gamer with the nonsense plot surrounding each character's evolution (something which happens regularly, and basically means some hair dye and a new fireball animation), but unless you know it already, you won't care.



In its defence, it is fairly smooth, the cel-shaded characters look as good as they should and the pace of the battles can be enjoyable, particularly when you get the hang of the parry system. If Dimps thinks that's enough to get fans of the anime to buy this, then… well, it's probably right.



SHALLOW, PREDICTABLE BEAT-'EM-UP FARE



WE HOPE YOU BROUGHT YOUR SKILLS…

IBARA

FINGERPRINT
games™
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LOVELY LADIES: The Rose Sisters have to be the finest villainesses we've ever seen.
TOUGH TIMES: The better you are, the more difficult it gets. Genius.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PS2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Taito

DEVELOPER
Cave

PRICE
¥6,140 (around £30)

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

If you happened to be standing in a Japanese arcade mid-2004, there's a fair chance you'll already have witnessed – not to mention spent a lot of money on – *Ibara*. It was exceptionally popular back then and of all the superb shoot-'em-ups that Cave has offered over the years, *Ibara* is the one that caused fans of the genre to stir – largely due to its familiar design.

Although many will argue that most games of this type look, feel, or play similarly, *Ibara* shares many design elements with the titles that Raizing produced before it closed its doors back in 2000. The reason? A good number of the team that was put together to work on *Ibara* was ex-Raizing and the result of this meeting of minds is a superb shooter – a shooter that's now been released on the PS2 for the masses to enjoy.

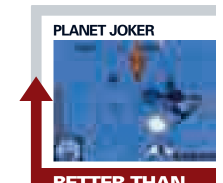
The first thing to point out is that *Ibara* is unfeasibly tough. Even within a genre that's noted for its insane difficulty levels and unforgiving nature, this game manages to stand apart. Fortunately, unlimited Continues and a Practice mode are available for those not wanting to earn a place on the scoreboard – but we all know that to do these things properly you need only one credit.

Beating the six Rose Sisters with this credit is quite a challenge. Impossible, actually, largely due to the game mechanic that determines difficulty. You see, the more medals and power-ups you collect, the more the difficulty soars. Completing the first two of the six stages without losing a life results in the screen being so full of enemy fire, that a strategic loss is almost essential if you wish to progress. Add to this Raizing's classic yet brutally harsh rank system which sees you creating and collecting streams of medallions, and you have yourself quite a challenge.

It's actually quite hard to fault *Ibara* in any meaningful way other than it really doesn't enhance the genre in any way – but since when has that stopped a shoot-'em-up being great? Music and visuals are stunning every step of the way, and as long as you're a fan of the genre, are able to accept that you're going to explode a lot, and have the ability to work and exploit a small hit box there's little not to like.

VERDICT 7/10
A FINE HOMAGE TO RAIZING

PLANET JOKER

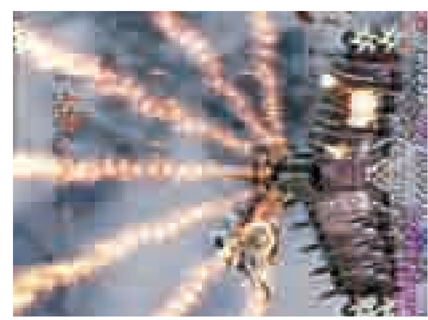


BETTER THAN

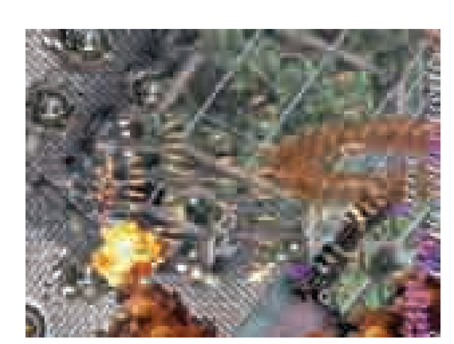
WORSE THAN



IKARUGA



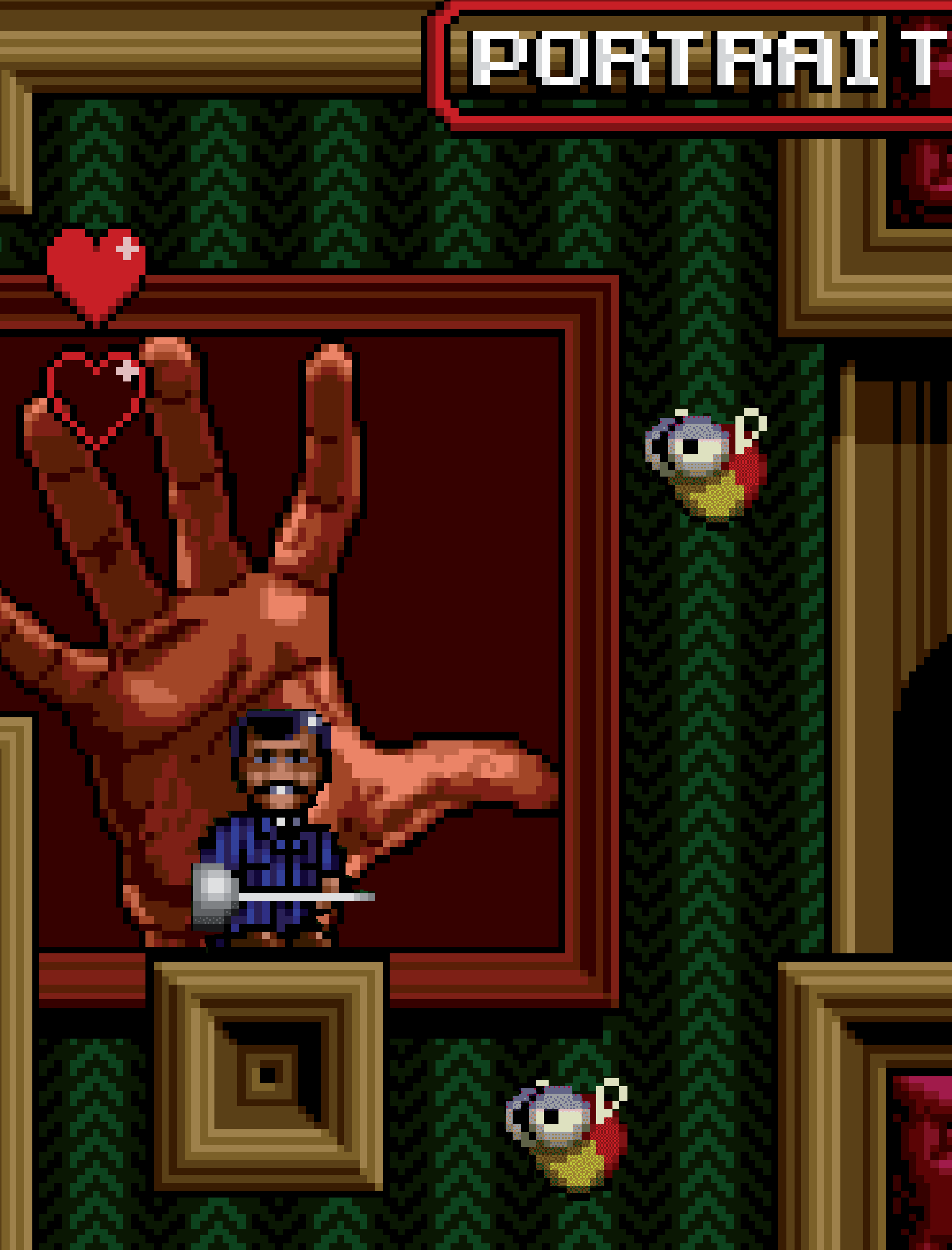
Oh, how we laugh in the face of infinite Continues.



There's nowhere to turn for you in this rather fine shoot-'em-up.



Go on then, let's see you dodge them all…


PORTRAIT



It's mysterious and spooky, and as hard as a bed of rusty nails. **The Addams Family, SNES [Ocean] 1991**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.43 APR 2006
00p
TURRICAN
BEHIND THE CLASSIC TRILOGY
WAY OF THE NINJA
We relive The Last Ninja
DOUBLE DRAGON
One of the greatest ever
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, ULTIMATE COLLECTION, RETRO REVIEW: GUNSTAR HEROES: TREASURE BOX, RETRO CONTACT, AND MORE…
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic consoles and legendary software

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Now, do we have a packed-to-the-brim retro section for you to fondly flick through, or what? It's been a hectic time here at games™ HQ, but things have finally settled down, which has given me the chance to indulge in one of my favourite past times – browsing the forums.

Rather than use them as a way of stroking my already huge ego, I now use them to gauge people's reactions to the magazine. One thread keeps popping up lately, and I'd like to take this opportunity to put a few readers' minds at ease as it would appear that people are beginning to worry about Retro. All I can say is don't worry. games™'s retro section is designed to massage your brain and fill you with a warm glow of nostalgia – and that is what it will continue to do.

With comprehensive features on the *Turrican* trilogy and *The Last Ninja*, as well as indepth reviews of games and consoles past and present, together with your views and feedback you certainly won't be disappointed with what's in store this issue. So what are you waiting for? Get reading.



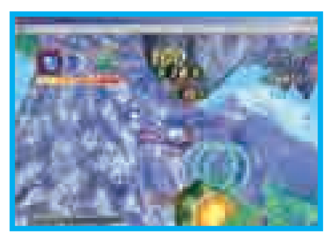
Darren Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer

SONIC TEAM'S YUJI NAKA RUMOURED TO BE LEAVING SEGA

SO LONG, SONIC

A recent news story on the Next Generation website would suggest that Sonic Team's CEO Yuji Naka may be leaving Sega to start up his own company. It's rumoured that he will maintain close ties with Sega, and that his new studio may even be funded by it.

Many gamers insist that today Sonic Team is a poor reflection of its former self, not delivering anything in recent years to match the creativity and brilliance of the developer's earlier days. You only have to look at recent titles such as *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg*, *Sonic Heroes* and *Shadow The Hedgehog* to realise that they lack the wonder and excitement of earlier Naka hits such as *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, *Phantasy Star Online* and *Burning Rangers*.



▲ Many believe that Sonic Team is losing its edge.



▲ Little-known fact: Naka speaks fluent English.

Regardless of the quality of Sonic's more recent outings (the superb *Sonic Rush* being the most noticeable exception), the blue hedgehog still rakes in plenty of cash for Sega. Perhaps that's the problem? Could it be that Naka no longer wants to make commercialised titles, instead wishing to return to his earlier glory days? Or was Sonic Team's real creativity born out of the input from Naoto Oshima, a man who eventually left the developer to form Artoon. Whatever the end scenario, you can be sure that **games™ Retro** will reveal the news in an upcoming issue.

CAPCOM CON

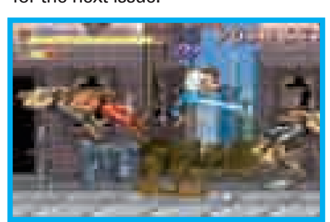
CAPCOM'S LATEST COMPILATION SLIPS



Ever since Capcom announced that it would be releasing a new remixed version of its hit Xbox and PlayStation2 compilation *Capcom Classics Collection* we've been tremendously excited. This latest selection of retro reminiscence is set to include such arcade hits as *Mega Twins*, *Black Tiger*, *Strider*, *Final Fight*, *1941* and *Magic Sword*. That's an incredible amount of gaming goodness crammed onto the one UMD, and we haven't even mentioned the other 15 games that also feature.

So why are we so upset, you may be wondering? Well, it could have something to do with the fact that the game has again been put back – this time till June. Quite why it's taking so long is anyone's guess; the games themselves shouldn't be too hard to convert. It could well be that Capcom is looking for a more suitable time in its schedule to release it.

Fortunately, all is not lost as the American version of the game is now finally available on import and can be bought from the likes of www.videogamesplus.ca for a fairly reasonable price. With any luck we'll be bringing you a shiny review in time for the next issue.



by David Leafe

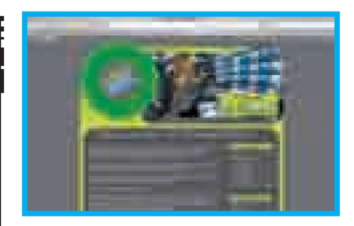
R•E•T•R•O• N•E•W•S• R•E•T•R•O• N•E•W

PUMPING ON YOUR STEREO

NEW SEGA RADIO SHOW LAUNCHED

Do all you Sega fanatics out there think you can handle just a little more juicy information? In fact, whether you're a follower of Sega's antics or not, you may want to head on over to the rather splendid http://radio.mysega.co.uk anyway. It's a fantastic new website that features a massive amount of classic Sega tunes.

Created by Warrington-based Mark Kidley, Radio Sega already features over 900 different music tracks from some brilliant games including *Skies Of Arcadia*, *Burning Rangers* and *Streets Of Rage*. The station has proved to be a huge success with those lucky enough to listen in, and Kidley is promising to cover as many different soundtracks as possible over the coming months, with music streamed 24 hours a day.



▲ Tune in, log on and rock out. Sega-tastic, baby.

"Radio Sega's aim is to include classic music from both first and third parties that were exclusive to the Sega machines," explains Kidley. "I've always loved Sega music and soon found out that others shared my love, after that it was just a case of putting it all together."

Radio Sega currently supports Windows Media, Winamp, iTunes, Realplayer and Nero, so there's no reason why you can't have a listen to this amazing site. You can almost hear the sounds of the past…

YOU SHALL GO TO THE BALL

THE RETRO BALL RETURNS WITH A BRAND NEW NAME

Right, so if you read issue 41's edition of Retro you'll recall the splendid time that we had at last year's rather spiffy Retro Ball. Organised by videogame veteran Chris Wilkins and held at The Wardens Cricket Club in Kenilworth, this event was a fantastic opportunity to play a plethora of classic videogames, and meet industry heroes such as Jon Hare, Archer Maclean and the Oliver Twins.

Well, it now appears that Wilkins has been hard at work over the past few months as he's just announced the date – as well as a new name – for this year's show. Dubbed Retro Fusion: A Weekend Of Gaming, the two-day event will fall on 30 September and will take place in the same venue.

There's no solid news yet with regards to who will be attending or how the games will be displayed, but Wilkins has been listening to the various feedback from the first event and promises it will be even better. More on this as and when we get it.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming becomes increasingly popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events…

APRIL '06

Tetris DS

Date: 21 April **Publisher:** Nintendo **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** DS

How can *Tetris DS* possibly fail? The original is one of the most highly rated puzzle games ever and it single-handedly propelled the original Game Boy to superstardom. This version features the ability to play against nine players, plenty of new gameplay modes and all your favourite Nintendo characters. What more could you possibly want?

Rampage: Total Destruction

Date: 28 April **Publisher:** Midway: £39.99 **Format:** PS2, Xbox

The original *Rampage* wasn't that good. Sure, it was fun for the first few levels and featured some comical visuals, but it soon became mind-numbingly boring to play through. Still, there's always a chance that this brand-new update will be able to sidestep the problems of the original and deliver something new to the series. Here's hoping eh?

JUNE '06

Street Fighter Alpha Anthology

Date: 02 June **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £39.99 **Format:** PS2

This latest compilation features all four *Street Fighter Alpha* titles, as well as the rather excellent *Pocket Fighters*. While all the games have been released on home systems previously, this is the first time that they've all appeared on the one disc. Fans of the series are going to be very, very spoiled indeed.

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

Date: 02 June **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

We finally have details on this long-awaited PSP compilation of arcade brilliance. No less than 20 retro favorites have been squeezed in, some with the bonus of wireless multi-player! Included are some beauties: *1941*, *Magic Sword*, *Street Fighter*, and *Strider*. Scheduled for release in March in the US, we're through waiting for this classic anthology.

Sensible Soccer

Date: 09 June **Publisher:** Capcom **Price: £29.99 Format:** PSP

In our heart of hearts we can't help but wonder if Codemasters would have been better off sticking with the original Amiga hit and releasing it on Xbox Live Arcade. Still, despite the strange look of the players and the fact that nothing has been able to touch *Pro Evolution* for years, we're sure that Mr Hare is going to have a few tricks up his sleeves.

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Extreme Ghosts 'N' Goblins

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

We're not sure if this is such a good idea for a remake, to be honest. *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* was ridiculously hard in its original form, so we can't imagine things being any different this time around. Surely that's going to result in more than a few broken PSPs before the day is out?

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the magazine at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk.



GUNSTAR HEROES

A TREASURE, INDEED

So far, the Sega 'classics' collections have been quite, quite abysmal. Instead of heading down the emulation route, the publisher has seen fit to 'adapt' its videogames for the modern audience and re-render them in horrible, sub-standard 3D. Recently, though, it appears to have learned its lesson, because *Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box* (volume 25 of the *Sega Ages* collection) is exactly what retro fans are after – faithfully ported, un-bastardised, emulated versions of three rare Mega Drive games for only 15 quid. Who could ask for anything more?



Gunstar Heroes. What majesty. And now in glorious high definition!



The compilation may only comprise of three games, but when you consider that a copy of *Alien Soldier* on its own is likely to set you back anything from £50 to several hundred depending on its condition, this collection is extremely good value for money. The three Treasure games contained within are Mega Drive classics and are what made Treasure such a critical success back in the Nineties. Though *Gunstar Heroes* is undoubtedly the main attraction, *Dynamite Headdy* was something of a cult hit back in the day and offers a refreshingly different style of gameplay to the other two games in the collection. *Alien Soldier* was released in Europe (although it never actually reached American shores), but it's so hard to come by that not that many people are unlikely to have played it before – which makes this a valuable opportunity to experience one of the most action-packed, explosive and ridiculously difficult games ever made for the Mega Drive.

Doing away with all the in between bits, *Alien Soldier* is a series of ludicrously hardcore, varied boss battles interrupted by about 20 seconds' worth of more standard blasting. To those who've never had the pleasure of experiencing it before it will probably seem impenetrably difficult, but perseverance is rewarded with arguably the best Treasure title on the Mega Drive – it's certainly the rarest.

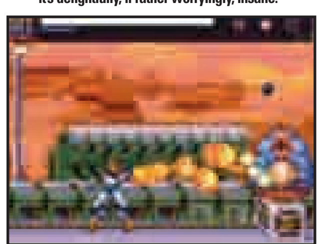
Gunstar Heroes, however, has received similarly impressive treatment. Where the recent Game Boy Advance *Gunstar Heroes* tragically did away with the multi-player, it remains perfectly intact here, along with the frenetic action and weapon combinations that made it so popular in the first place. The game doesn't seem to have aged too badly either; it's just as much fun now as it ever was, and both the impressive sprites and high-speed action retain all their visual splendour.

Arguably, though, the most impressive thing about this classic collection isn't the fact that the games are beautifully emulated; it's the range of options available for playing them. Each game has both a Japanese and 'Overseas' version, which removes what little language barrier there is and also lets interested gamers examine the localisation changes that were made to the games (especially *Dynamite Headdy* whose bosses underwent some pretty dramatic aesthetic changes here in the west). You can even set the game to progressive scan mode (navigating the Japanese is not at all challenging) and slightly alter the look of the games through a variety of filters. There's also an enormous selection of game artwork for each title – the manual is simply filled with colourful tributes to the games and some Japanese commentary on their influence and success.

Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box is pretty much everything anyone could ever hope for from a Treasure classics collection. The games have been ported with admirable consideration and an outstanding attention to detail. To top it all off, three such fine titles rarely come along for just £15. Considering their rarity in original form, anybody interested in Treasure's back catalogue would be doing themselves an immense disservice if they didn't make the effort to buy this – after all, the shipping from Japan will hardly break the bank.

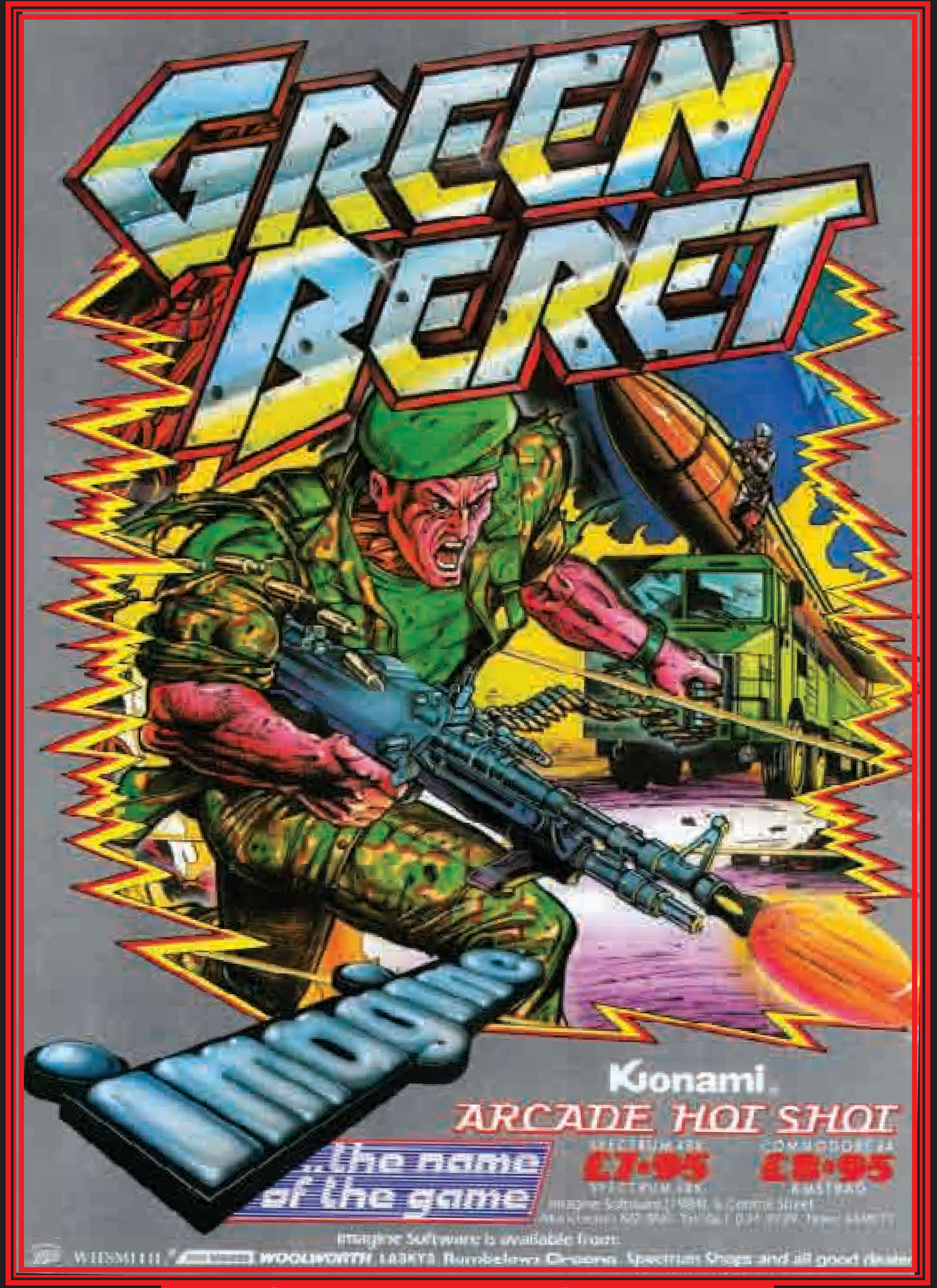


Dynamite Headdy will mess with your head a bit – it's delightfully, if rather worryingly, insane.



Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Treasure
Release: Japan: Out Now
Price: ¥3,000 (around £15)
Games: *Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy, Alien Soldier*

OVERALL SCORE 90%



GREEN BERET [Various Formats] Konami, 1986 – Original UK Advert



Greatest RETRO Game Ever

DOUBLE DRAGON

Double the fun, double the trouble

TO COOL FOR HOME

Considering the success of the arcade game, it was inevitable that *Double Dragon* would appear on home formats. Amazingly though, practically every version of the game failed to capture the magic that made the arcade title so much fun. There have been a few passable outings over the years (the Game Boy and Mega Drive versions spring to mind) but its only the recent GBA *Double Dragon Advance* that came near the glory of its arcade parent. Sadly, the only way to truly experience the original is to play the actual arcade game, and that's not that easy to come by nowadays.



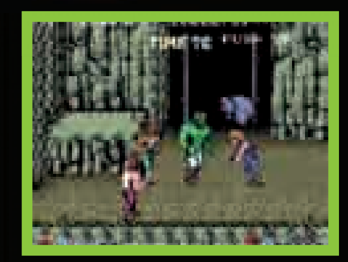
▲ There have been sequels and follow-ups, but nothing to rival this classic original.

Release: 1987
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Taito
Developer: Technos

***Double Dragon's* intro is not one you'll easily forget. A beautiful girl is waiting for her boyfriend when she's approached by a group of thugs, brutally punched in the stomach and abducted.** Before you register the fact that you saw Marian's white cotton panties as she's being carried off, a nearby garage door opens and two brothers, Billy and Jimmy Lee, set off in hot pursuit. What followed was a vibrant and kinetic fighter that gave the scrolling beat-'em-up a serious kick up the arse when it was released 20 years ago. Even today it is an enjoyable scrapper that's spawned and inspired numerous games and sequels.

Technos was no stranger to violence in the arcades as it released the excellent *Renegade* the previous year, and many elements from its earlier fighter ended up in *Double Dragon*. Whereas *Renegade* took place over small, confined playing areas, *Double Dragon* was a huge sprawling affair that took the two brothers through some of the worst

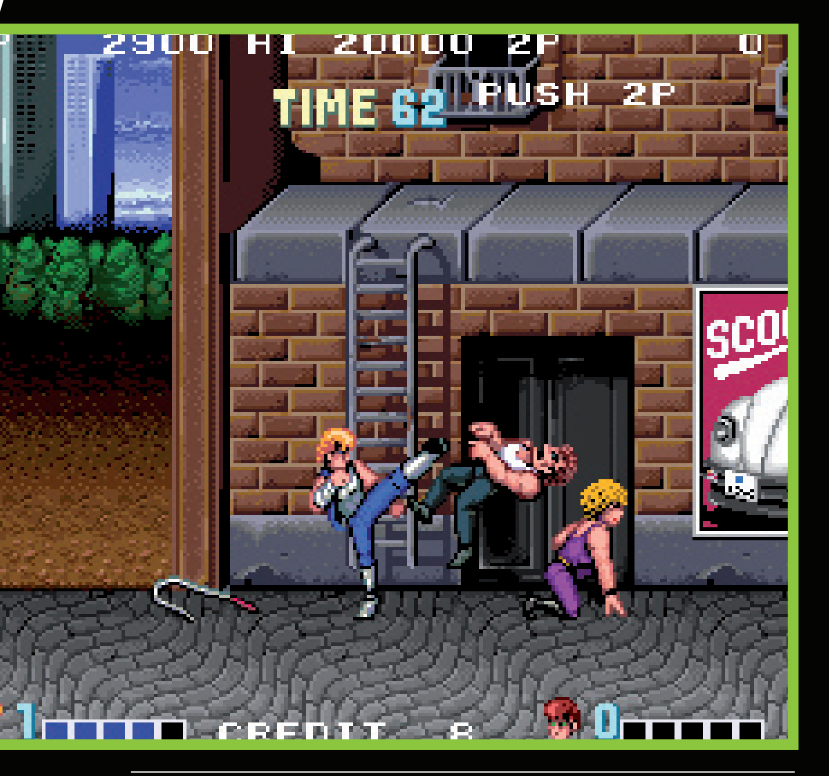




areas in town. Starting off in some dodgy back streets, the action soon shifted to an abandoned factory, through a creepy forest before finally catching up with boss leader Willy on that unmistakable red carpet.

Sure, it was short, but *Double Dragon* was filled with so much character and boyish enthusiasm that you constantly found yourself returning for one more go. It may not have been the first scrolling fighter, but its arrival on the arcade scene provided gamers with plenty of exciting gameplay experiences they'd never forget. For starters it looked fantastic and was a world away from the grittiness of *Renegade*. Billy and Jimmy were extremely well animated and featured a dazzling array of combat moves, all of which were brutal in their execution and provided a sharp contrast to the game's smart cartoonish visuals. Punching an enemy several times would stun him, which then enabled you to grab him and repeatedly knee the poor sod in the face. Lovely. You could then continue hammering the kick button and eventually lay your opponent out in front of you, or send him flying over your shoulder with a quick jab of the punch button.

While you initially had access to three different buttons – punch, jump and kick – different button combos would provide new (often overpowered) moves. Indeed, it was these extra attacks that proved the only flaws in what was otherwise a polished title. Holding down the punch and jump buttons gave you a powerful shoulder attack, while a quick double tap to the left or right would allow the brothers to unleash a devastating head butt. Sadly, it



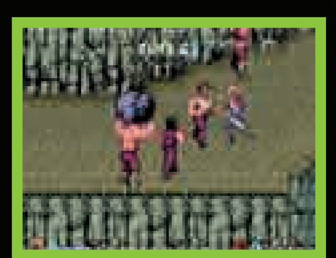
▲ Nearly 20 years later and *Double Dragon* still gets pulses racing.

"A VIBRANT AND KINETIC FIGHTER"

was possible to complete the entire game with just these two moves, an annoyance to arcade owners, but a delight to players as at 20 pence it meant amazing value for money.

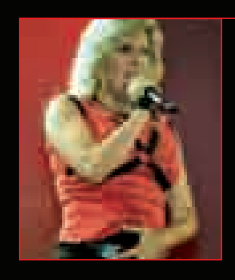
Weapons were also in great supply in *Double Dragon*, and ranged from heavy-duty baseball bats to simple throwing knives that would mark an enemy with a comedy splatter of blood if they were unlucky enough to get hit by them. Purple-clad ladies of the night wielded deadly whips; huge, bug-eyed behemoths threw giant rocks at you, while sticks of dynamite exploded with devastating results. Even the environment wasn't safe; the ground was often filled with pits that the unwary could fall into. It may have been possible to complete the game with hardly any credits, but Technos made the experience so enjoyable that you just didn't care.

And that was one of *Double Dragon's* greatest strengths. For all its foibles, it remained enjoyable from the moment your first credit registered to its shocking ending that saw you fighting your mates for a kiss from Marian. It may have since been superseded by better scrolling fighters, but Technos' superb brawler remains an enduring fighter and a classic slice of beat-'em-up history.



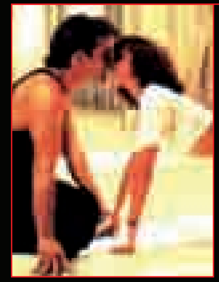


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1987



ON THE RADIO

Not content with getting her massive, dirty pillows out on page three of the *Sun*, Sam Fox decided that she needed to go on to bigger and better things. As a result, our ears were assaulted with the god-awful *Touch Me (I Want To Feel Your Body)*. Unsurprisingly, Sam's music career soon fizzled out. Still, there's always your tits to fall back on.



AT THE MOVIES

If you were unlucky enough to have a girlfriend, chances are you were dragged off to see this chick flick, coming-of-age movie starring Patrick Swayze (or The Swizzler as he's known to his mates). Looking back now, there's something unsettling about the way the dirty 40 year-old bumps uglies with a girl who had barely turned 16. It's *Donnie Darko* all over again.



ON THE TELEVISION

The truly excellent *Dungeons & Dragons* series came to an end in 1987 – halfway through its third season. Like many classic kids shows, practically every episode was essentially the same. The kids would be told of a possible way home, they'd fight a few Bullywugs and then foil Venger, only to find their exit blocked. While they made it up in the final script it was never actually aired. Doh!



▲ A vast array of weapons were available in this violent scrolling shooter.

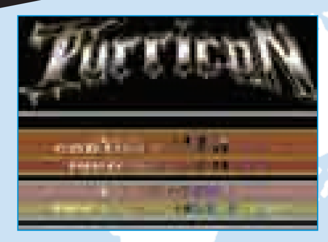

Retro Feature

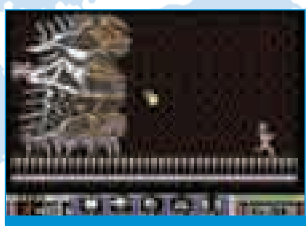


>TURRICAN TRILOGY

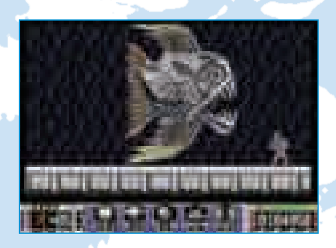
Platform gaming has always been a popular concept, usually involving running and jumping left to right, destroying or avoiding your foes and collecting certain objects along the way. In 1990, however, a game came along that took a fresh look at this simple idea, adding multi-directional scrolling, an impressive arsenal of weapons, a huge play area and unbelievable graphics. The game was *Turrican*, and it went on to spawn a series of official and unofficial sequels. To celebrate this splendid classic trilogy Shaun Bebbington takes a closer look at this explosive series to find out how it ticked...

Manfred Trenz, a C64 coder who had previously worked on *The Great Giana Sisters*, *Katakis* and *R-Type*, was looking to create an eight-way scrolling game that combined shoot-'em-up and platform elements. His initial work led to the release of a small, playable preview entitled *Hurrican* in 1989. By 1990, the game had evolved with the new name *Turrican* and was released on the Commodore 64. As the new decade dawned, some heralded it as the end of the 8-bit era – the natural evolution to 16-bit machines. However, this was not to be the case as *Turrican* set new standards on the C64 for others to follow with fast, smooth-scrolling 'near-Amiga-quality' graphics. *Turrican* was far more than just nice visuals, though, as the game offered a superb blend of playability and exploration. The naysayers had been silenced and Manfred's game was an instant hit.

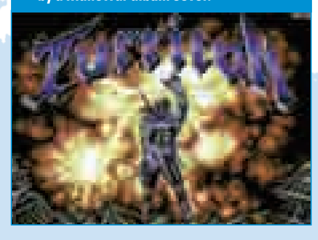


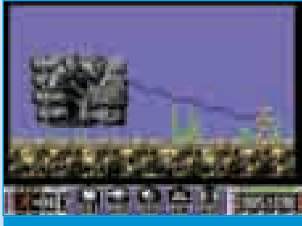


Turrican introduced some of the most awesome end-of-level monsters seen on the C64. The Fish (below) was particularly impressive.

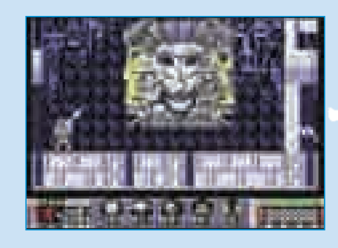


The Turrican loading screen was inspired by a Manowar album cover.





The Fist greeted you after you completed the first level. The last end-of-level guardian is shown below.



The Original

The weaponry available in *Turrican* was refreshing. You started off with a single laser shot and three energy walls, and gyroscopes, grenades and mines. Your basic fire could be upgraded to a powerful laser and a multi-shot. By holding Fire you spewed out a constant lightning flash that could be rotated clockwise or anti-clockwise in small steps of approximately 12 degrees at a time. This meant you would have a 360-degree range of defence which was especially handy when dealing with the huge guardians.

You'd usually expect to encounter a guardian at the end of each level, but after completing the first, you were almost instantly greeted by the mighty Fist. This awesome sight was the first of many treats uncovered as you progressed through the game.

With regard to exploration, *Turrican* contained 13 levels split into five worlds, and was made up of a total of 1,300 screens. To prevent the game from becoming samey, levels 1-3 and 3-3 featured a vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up section. There were also hidden bonus blocks that would throw out upgrades for your armoury, and the odd extra life. Many other screens were hidden about the game, requiring pixel-perfect jumps to find them, or using your gyroscope for extra lives, diamonds and other rewards.

Turrican had everything from graphics to sound effects, and presentation to gameplay – Trenz had single-handedly redefined the 8-bit platforming genre. But he wasn't about to stop there, as the end sequence suggested with its closing words: "THE END...??" But would the sequel live up to the now high expectations?

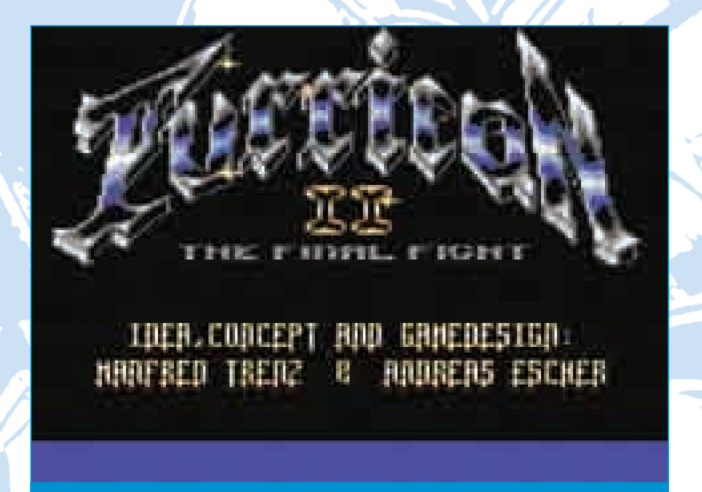
The Final Fight

Anticipation for the sequel was evidently high. At a computer show in Cologne, 900 copies of a *Turrican II* demo were to be given out, but more people than expected rushed to get a copy. In the chaos, two people even suffered minor injuries.

Subtitled *The Final Fight*, the follow-up was released less than a year after the original, and began with a comic book-style introduction sequence, setting both the story and tone of the game. Unsurprisingly, *Turrican II* featured additional firepower, more screens and three traditionally styled shoot-'em-up levels (this time horizontally scrolling in the first, multi-directional in the second and super-fast parallax scrolling from left to right in the third). It was all impressively implemented, especially when you consider the perceived limited technology of the C64.

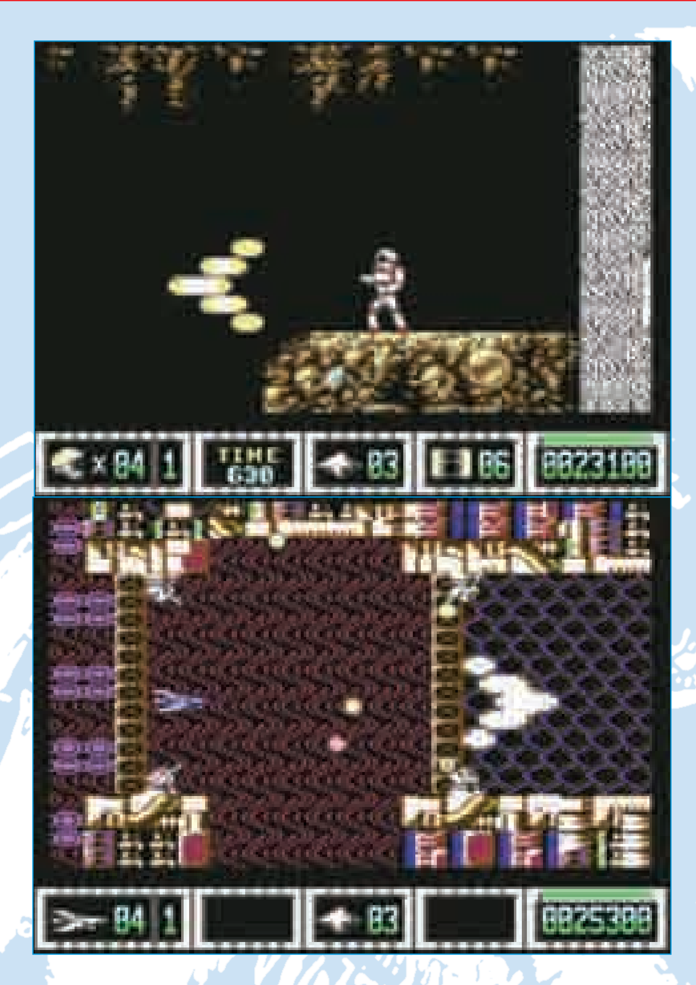
Other innovations and changes were made to the sequel. Your gyroscope could be used as often as you liked, and in this state you could unleash a timed smart bomb by pressing Fire. The laser multi-shot fired in upto five directions at once, covering a 90-degree angle in front of you. A new and impressive weapon was also introduced which deployed two bouncing bombs. These destructive balls eliminated oncoming enemies on contact, and were perfect for clearing narrow paths above or below you.

Turrican II retained the intense playability and 'one more go' factor of the original – and was bigger and better, with many more secret screens to discover. On finishing the game, Trenz stated that



When an early demo of *Turrican 2* was released at a computer show in Cologne, two people were injured in the scramble to get a copy.





Turrican II was his last game for the C64, followed by the words: "This is definitely THE END". However, due to popular demand, 1992 saw the release of *Enforcer: Fullmetal Megablast*, a follow-up to his work on the game *Katakis* which later (due to legalities) became *Denaris*.

Third Degree

Although Trenz did release one more game for the C64 – as a sort of testimonial, if you like – *Turrican 3* sadly never saw the light of day on the 8-bit. By 1992, the UK market was more than wavering, and many of the larger publishers were turning to the new, super-powerful 16-bit technology. The greatly anticipated *Turrican 3* on the Amiga was met with high expectations. The publisher even managed to charge a small fee for the pre-release demo disk.

When released, though, the game seemed to somewhat tarnish the series. Ever keen to innovate, the laser beam from the first two games was dropped and replaced with an extendable *Bionic Commando*-style device which would grab onto platforms and walls, allowing the player to swing to hard-to-reach places and progress through the level. Unfortunately, this was awkward and difficult to use, taking the edge off gameplay.

An underwater level was included and the game had some formidable bosses, but nothing made this release stand out in the way the originals did. The graphics were a bit dull and some of the levels were too small. Hidden areas were included, but the title just didn't inspire you to look for them. *Turrican 3* aimed high but plummeted into the ever-widening band of mediocrity. This was a great shame and left fans of the series wondering what *Turrican 3* would have been like on the humble C64. But wait, *Turrican 3* is on the C64, isn't it?

The Saga Goes On

Trenz's work is held in high esteem on the European C64 scene (he's referred to as 'The Master' throughout Europe), particularly by coders and developers, and they are always looking to push the boundaries of the technology. After *Turrican II* and before the publication of games that others such as Protovision and Smash Designs were developing, a demo called *Scorpion* found its way into the public domain. This *Turrican* clone featured a slightly different main character, but seemingly the same weaponry. *Scorpion* aimed to pick up where *Turrican II* left off, and although it had nothing to do with the great *Trenz*, it was a good enough preview, and used the basic engine (even if some of the graphics were seemingly ripped out of the first two games and tweaked a little). Very little is known about this, other than its name and obvious influences.

The Protovision boys then came up with *T3*, a game once again inspired by the originals. A fully playable level was designed introducing a new drone weapon that would detach and fire in several directions (diagonally at all corners and left or right depending on which way you moved it). An improved sprite-handling routine meant little or no flicker during play, and the levels were as large as those in the originals. Other than the missing gyroscope, it played very much like *Turrican II*, with nice SID music and sound effects to accompany it.

This looked to be the most promising of the unofficial sequels, and was reportedly 60 per cent complete, but for several reasons it will never be finished. The pre-release demo version that Protovision







■ *Turrican 3* saw the return of the machine's evil minions.

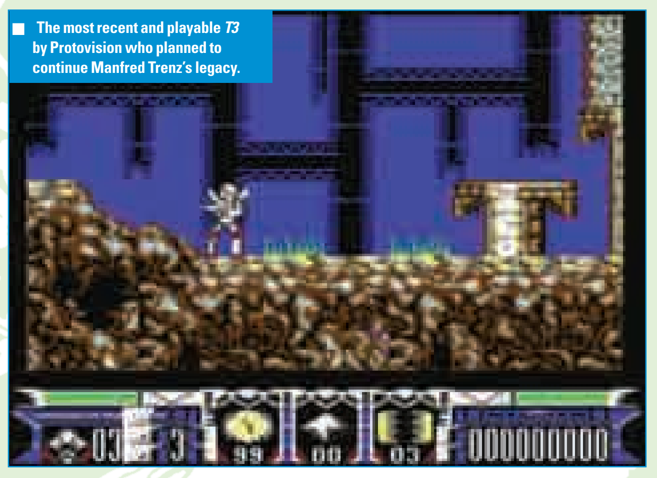


presented at a scene party was stolen and cracked by a group called Laxity. This meant that the guys behind *T3* were unwilling to finish the title, and so production was abandoned and almost forgotten. Those who purchased Protovision's *Hockey Mania* will be able to play a complete level from the intended production, and see some of the other worlds while contemplating what might have been.

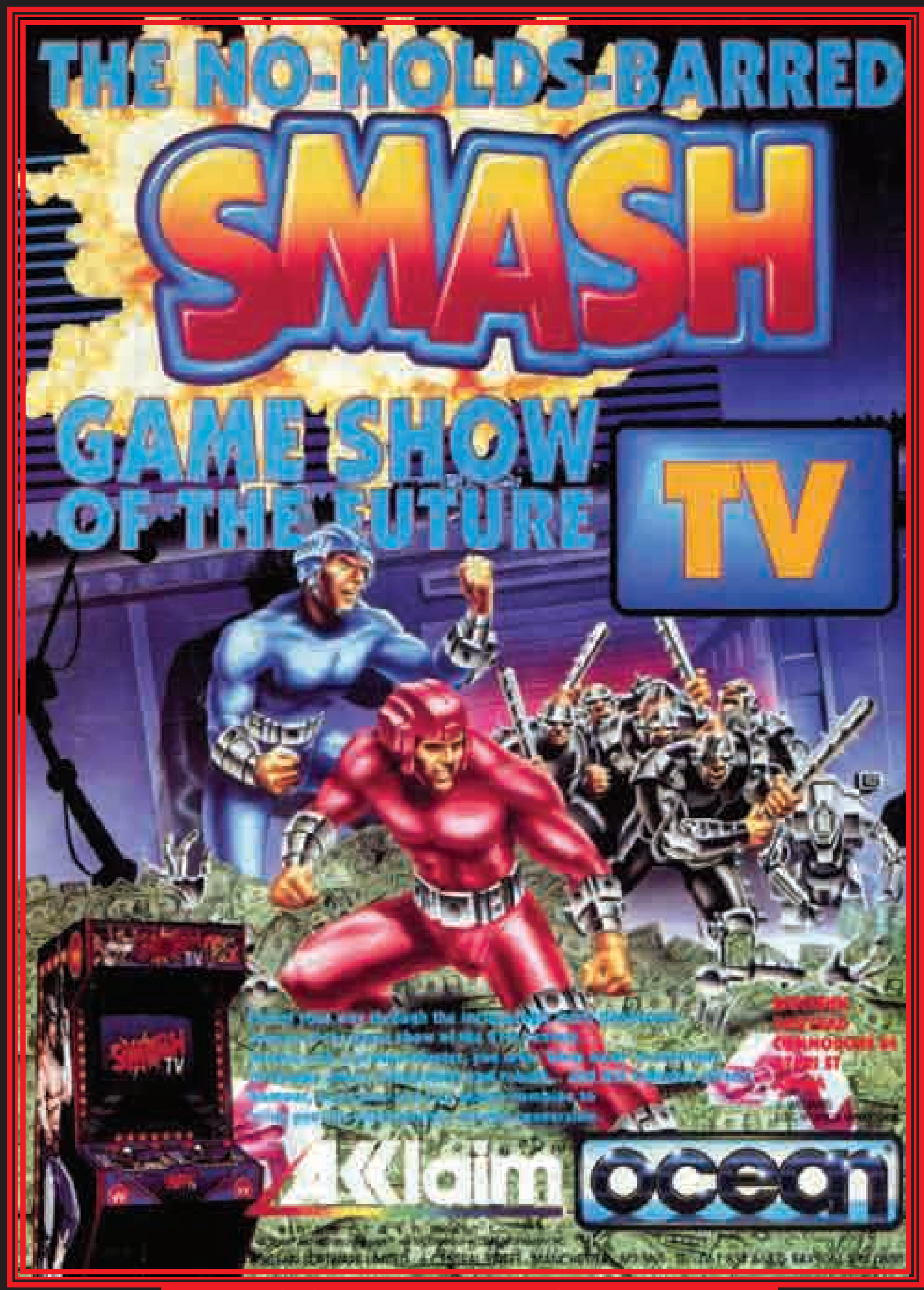
The Dark Side

The most recent *Turrican*-based game is *Turrican 3: Return Of Darkness* by AEG of Smash Designs. This slickly presented production has taken around seven years to complete and, although unofficial, it's a fine tribute to the mighty Trenz himself. This version initially looks very similar to *Turrican II*, but has five new worlds to explore and new enemies to do battle with. A graphically improved Fist returns; bosses are big, bad and awesome looking. The gyroscope can be used as often as you like, though it won't destroy any of the oncoming foes, and the weapons are identical to those in *Turrican II*.





■ The most recent and playable *T3* by Protovision who planned to continue Manfred Trenz's legacy.



SMASH TV [Various Formats] Acclaim, 1991 – Original UK Advert



The Last Ninja

Back in 1987, System 3 released *The Last Ninja*, a game that illuminated the world of the Commodore 64. Viewed in fabulous isometric 3D, it blended traditional beat-'em-up action with puzzle-solving gameplay and spawned a number of sequels, ports and remixes. Now, a new version is in development (hell) for the PS2 so, with that in mind, Shaun Bebbington takes times to reflect on this classic series

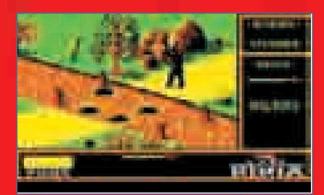
You could be forgiven for thinking that London-based developer System 3 was only interested in releasing martial arts games. All of its memorable titles were based around an oriental theme until the release of *Tusker* in 1989. Its first popular title was called *International Karate*, a game released in 1986 and licensed to Epyx for the American market under the moniker *World Championship Karate*. Then came the Commodore 64 release of *The Last Ninja*, a game that took the beat-'em-up concept to a whole new level, cementing System 3's position as a premier UK publishing house.

First Ninja

The Last Ninja was met with critical acclaim from the popular press and gamers alike. System 3 had created more than just another beat-'em-up. The isometric 3D environment was interactive, and the gameplay contained a mix of tricky puzzles and beat-'em-up action. Although you'd be limited to using set paths throughout the game, the levels were well thought out with each opening up as you solved or performed certain tasks.

The story started with the creation and popularisation of ninjitsu, which became the most feared and powerful martial art in the land. Not even the mighty samurai warriors dare test its power. Yet the evil shogun of the Ashikaga clan, Kunitoki, plotted against the order of the Ninja and successfully assassinated all but one of them. Armakuni, now the last ninja, escaped with his life and set out to avenge the deaths of his brotherhood.

In your quest to defeat Kunitoki and his clan, you had access to a variety of deadly weapons, but could also rely on straightforward hand-to-hand, toe-to-toe combat. Your character could turn in one of eight directions – shifting in steps of 90 degrees – and was able to walk backwards or to the side, as required. Rotating the joystick would turn him, and holding the fire button while moving in one of the eight directions would perform different actions, such as kick, punch or collect. This control method was awkward and fiddly, especially to begin with, and it was only after prolonged play that it felt anything close to instinctive.









■ Different versions of *The Last Ninja*. From top to bottom: the BBC/Electron version, the PC version, the Apple IIGS version and the Archimedes version.

Actually becoming accustomed to the control method and combat situations meant that this wasn't one of those games that you could just pick up and put down at will. Mastering *The Last Ninja* was, in itself, something akin to learning a martial art, making it popular with more mature and experienced players. Besides beating up enemies, advancing through the game often involved accurate timing and pixel-perfect movements. Jumping across streams and swamps, for example; a pixel out or a split second too late and you'd suffer death from drowning (we're guessing swimming wasn't on the timetable at ninja night-school). Despite these frustrating elements, and the severe learning curve, the game would drag you back again and again. You were on a quest, after all, and you wanted to see it through to the bitter end.

Imagine the disappointment, then, after many hours of play, working out the head-scratching puzzles and defeating the multitudes of heinous foes, only to finally finish the game and be told that, "The quest continues…". This was both good and bad: bad because the game (and the player) deserved better than a few closing words and a fade to black; good because there was the salivating prospect of a sequel.

Platform Jumping

Sales of the Commodore 64 release alone are reported to have reached in excess of 750,000 copies, and that's just within Europe. System 3 had a very lucrative hit on its hands, and the game was inevitably ported to several platforms, from the humble BBC Micro to the 32-bit Acorn Archimedes.

For its time, the most impressive thing about the title was the graphics with the original C64 version featuring over a thousand sprites. The game was split into a multi-load to accommodate the pixelated data. So it was amazing when the Acorn edition worked with the BBC Model B and Electron, as these machines had half the C64's memory. Superior Software's Peter Scott managed this feat by using lower-resolution graphics, while keeping it as close as possible to the original.

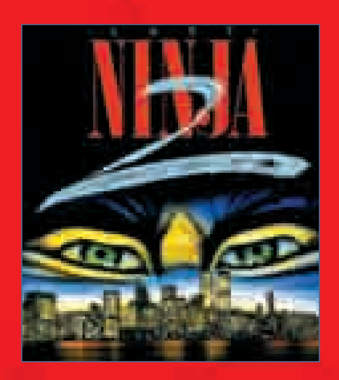
Superior Software published the Acorn edition while Activision took care of the similar-looking Apple II version. Other 8-bit ports for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Atari 800 were planned but never materialised. The Spectrum version was delayed on several occasions, with a preview in *Sinclair User* magazine revealing that the developers were having difficulties with making the main character move authentically. *Crash* later revealed that the game was only half finished, but by this time System 3 was readying the sequel for launch, and efforts were halted in favour of releasing the second game.

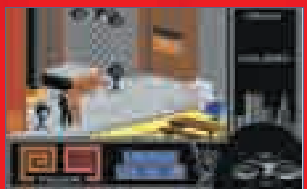
Other ports appeared on the 16-bit Apple IIGS and the IBM PC (EGA/CGA and compatibles), but it was the Acorn Archimedes that really stood out. Programmed by Andrew Catling and released a few years later in 1992, this was easily the best-looking version of the game ever with fantastic graphics throughout.

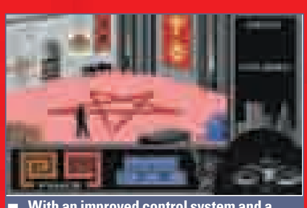
New York Ninjas

The Last Ninja II appeared on the Commodore 64 in 1988. Trying to add something unique to the sequel, System 3 brought the ninja action to a city environment, using time travel trick to place Armakuni in modern-day New York. Kunitoki had also been thrust into the future, and so the battle between them continued unabated.

The compulsive gameplay of the first title had not only been recreated, but also improved for this second venture. Although the control method was still rather fiddly, you were now able to kneel to collect objects, making it easier to pick up and use certain items. The pixel-perfect leaps that were required in the first game had gone for the most part, with a somewhat kinder environment. Also added was more fighting action from the outset. Once beaten, the thugs and other unsavoury characters would slowly regain their energy, returning to knock seven bells out of you again. You had to beat them again to truly finish them off.



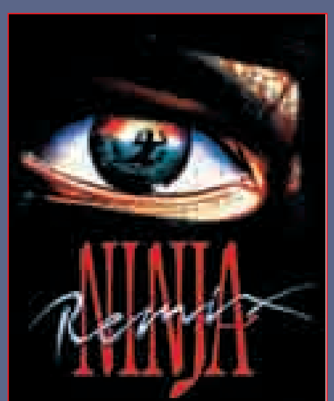




■ With an improved control system and a distinct setting, *Last Ninja II* is often hailed as the highlight of the series.

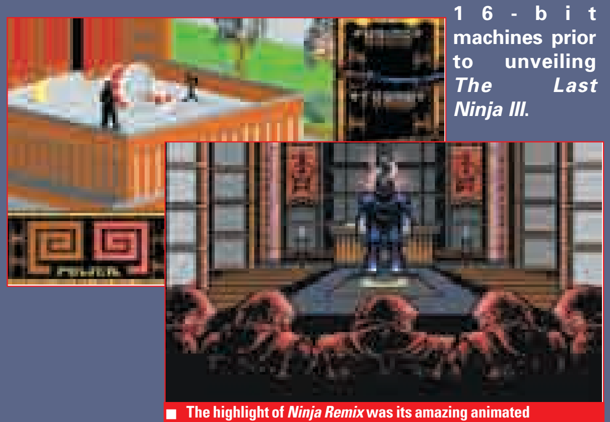
In The Mix

Rather than release *The Last Ninja II* as a budget title, System 3 chose to tart the title up and re-release it on 8-bit machines as *Last Ninja Remix*. The update featured a new introduction sequence, a different static screen surrounding the play area, arguably better music and a few small bug fixes. Essentially, though, it was the same game as *The Last Ninja II*.

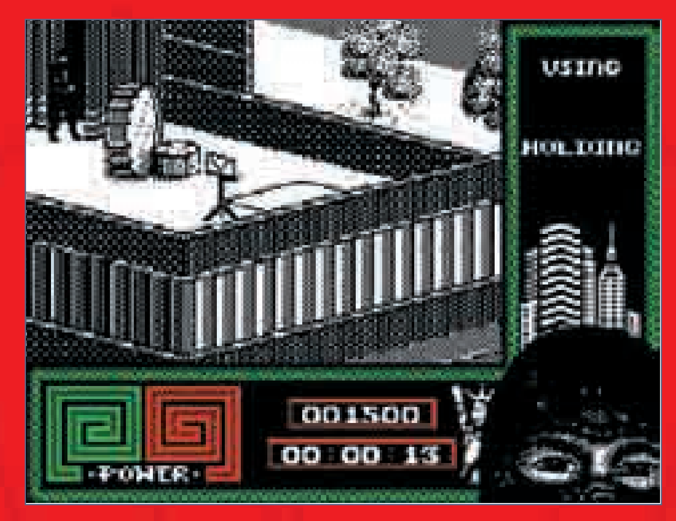


Ninja Remix appeared on the Commodore 64, Spectrum and Amstrad in 1990. To tie-in with the launch of the Commodore 64 GS console, a cartridge version of the game was also released for the C64 (the packaging claimed that the cart was, "Four megs", although this meant four megabits – 512 kilobytes – not four megabytes!). Even though the cartridge was compatible with all C64s, it did not sell in great numbers and is now sought after. Had the C64 GS been successful and the cartridge format proved more popular, System 3 would have released *Last Ninja III* on the medium. As it was, instead it played it safe by releasing the concluding title on tape and disk, and even though the instruction manual includes information for C64 GS users, no carts are known to exist.

Ninja Remix was also released on the Atari ST and Amiga, but for the 16-bit machines it was an update of *The Last Ninja*. This made far more sense, as the original game was never actually released for either machine first time around. Even though a playable version of the Atari ST game has since leaked out (complete with music from *International Karate*), *Ninja Remix* gave System 3 a chance to release the first game for 16-bit machines prior to unveiling *The Last Ninja III*.



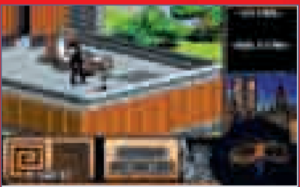
The highlight of *Ninja Remix* was its amazing animated introduction sequence.



Just as before, a lot of trial and error was needed to progress. Later levels would be more about fighting than puzzles. And just as you couldn't complete *The Last Ninja* without the key from the very first level, you couldn't finish the sequel without the computer code from the previous level. And that code was very easy to miss…

Upon release, *The Last Ninja II* was regarded as an improvement over its predecessor. It was more action-orientated, yet the puzzles remained an integral part of play, and the graphics had been buffed up. The new setting also served to introduce more atmosphere, resulting in a first-class action adventure that is widely regarded as the highlight of the series.

As with the original, the sequel has been converted to many different machines over the years, including those that missed out on the first. The Spectrum version unsurprisingly featured monochrome graphics, although it was a shame that the Amstrad edition was almost identical, taking no advantage whatsoever of the CPC's superior colour palette. The same could not be said of the Atari ST and Amiga versions which both featured beautifully vibrant visuals. Special mention must be made of the NES conversion. Entitled *The Last Ninja* (presumably to prevent possible confusion), the game marks the series' one and only appearance on a non-Commodore console.







The sequel appeared on many different machines. From top to bottom: The Amstrad version, the Atari ST version, the Amiga version and the NES version.







■ The Commodore 64 version of *The Last Ninja III* looked almost as good as its 16-bit counterparts.

Published under licence by Jaleco and developed by Beam Software, the game was easily the best 8-bit conversion, and with super-colourful graphics and a catchy soundtrack, it ranked alongside the C64 original.



The Last Ninja III saw Armakuni back in ancient times, bidding to end the shogun's evil reign of terror once and for all. The story was essentially the same and so, indeed, was the game. Regardless, *The Last Ninja III* was released with some bold claims behind it. In the manual, System 3 introduced its new game with the following paragraph: "Rarely does a company make as dramatic an impact as System 3 did with the award winning games *The Last Ninja* and *The Last Ninja II*. This software innovation proved to be a major advance in home computer entertainment achieving critical acclaim from the media and game players around the world."

Very bold indeed, especially as it had been three years since the release of *The Last Ninja II*. Time moves on and, by this third instalment, Armakuni's adventures were looking a little tired. It was the best-looking game to date; the C64 version was particularly impressive, almost on a par with the Atari ST and Amiga in terms of detail. However, the gameplay was beginning to show its age, and it became harder to forgive the archaic control system. Many would argue that *The Last Ninja III* was actually a step down from its predecessor, suffering poor level design and a lack of decent puzzles. It was by no means a bad game – it just failed to bring anything new to the ageing series.

The Last Ninja III was in development for the Spectrum and Amstrad, but sadly neither version materialised. A port appeared on the Amiga CD32, but despite quicker loading times, it was identical to the disk version.

From one CD-based console to another, System 3 was looking to release an all-singing, all-dancing new version of *The Last Ninja* on the Xbox. This 3D update has been in development hell for a few years now and doesn't look likely to happen now. In addition, the original *Last Ninja* trilogy was supposed to be heading to the PS2, with updated versions of all three games included on the single disc, but it seems that *The Last Ninja* series will forever be just a piece of gaming history.

The Last Ninja 4?

A fourth game was never intended to be commercially released for any of the 8-bit systems, at least not from System 3. However, the prolific Commodore 64 coder Jon Wells reworked the game engine so that the main character could walk on the grass, thus potentially making the play more open-ended.

Wells further mocked up a loading screen and playable demo based on *The Last Ninja II*, presenting it to System 3, saying that he wanted to make a fourth game as a tribute to the original trilogy. After the company refused, he said that he would be willing to work for free as long as he could use the name and relevant intellectual properties. System 3 still refused permission, seemingly not wanting to associate itself with the shrinking 8-bit market, and Wells had to abandon the project. Still, we can gaze at the loading screen and wonder what might have been...



■ Jon Wells wanted to pay tribute to the series by creating a fourth game.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS GAVIN HUGHES, A 28 YEAR-OLD CARE WORKER FROM HERTFORDSHIRE. WHEN HE'S NOT LOOKING AFTER ADULTS WITH PHYSICAL AND LEARNING DISABILITIES HE ENJOYS NOTHING MORE THAN A QUICK BLAST ON HIS IMPRESSIVE DREAMCAST COLLECTION…



▼ Gavin has spent the best part of £20,000 on his collection.

games™: So Gavin, how did your interest come about?

Gavin Hughes: I have to say that, in all honesty, it was by accident. I've always liked many genres of games, and so I'd do my best to get hold of pretty much any decent new release. This, combined with the fact that I always held onto my games, meant that my collection just grew and grew and grew.

g™: How long have you been collecting videogames for?

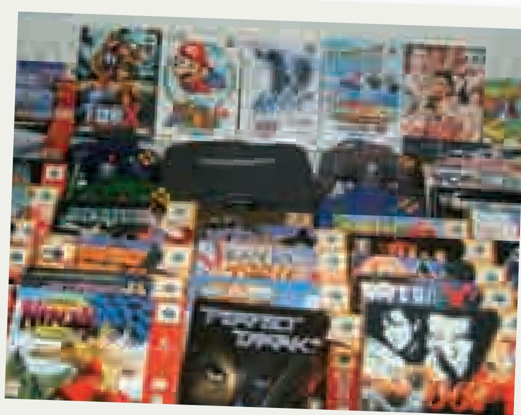
GH: For almost 20 years now, ever since my parents picked me up a Sega Master System. I've always tended to keep my games, very rarely selling them on or trading them in, so at first almost unwittingly started building up a collection without realising it. A few years later, I got a Mega Drive on launch day, with *Revenge Of Shinobi* and *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, and my expensive hobby was pretty much set from then on…

g™: Your 'expensive hobby'? You've obviously spent a fair amount over the years then…

GH: Across formats, I own well over 700 games now, and have probably paid an average of about £25 for each of them, taking fluctuating game prices into account. So that works out at about £18,000. I should probably feel quite depressed looking at that figure, but genuinely the entertainment that they've provided me with over the years has been well worth it.

g™: That's a mighty fine Dreamcast collection you have there…

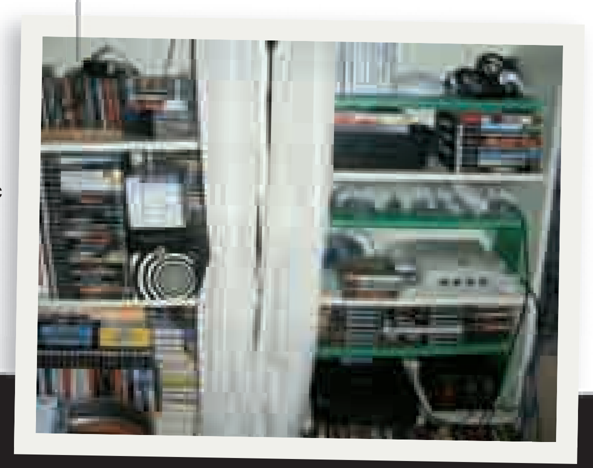
GH: Thanks. I picked up a Japanese Dreamcast on launch with *Virtua Fighter 3TB* and didn't have much change from my £500 – I've never once regretted it, though. What I love about Sega hardware, and in particular the Dreamcast, is that you knew you'd have access to great conversions of all the fantastic arcade games Sega developed. From *Virtua Tennis* and *Crazy Taxi* to more obscure titles like *Virtual On: Oratorio Tangram* and *Giant Gram*, you knew what you were going to get, and that it would be something special.

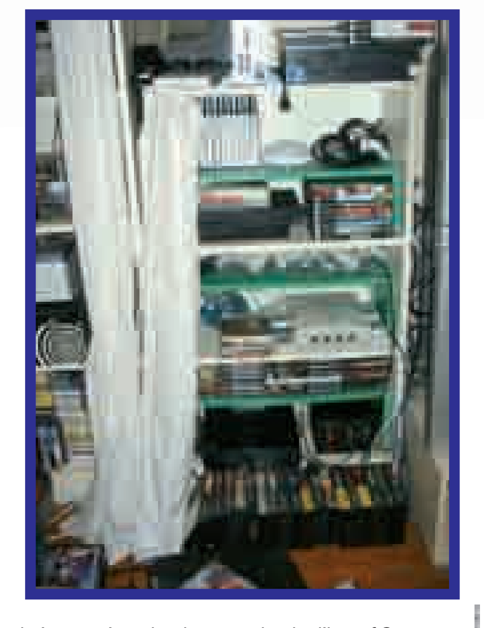


g™: You have a mixture of NTSC and PAL Dreamcast titles, any particular preference?

GH: Like most people, I far prefer the packaging and artwork of Japanese games to those of their western equivalents. I think it's disgraceful when you look at how much the average PAL game costs and then compare the lousy box and basic black and white manual to the wonderful artwork often found on the covers and in the booklets of Japanese titles.

I also like the fact that with Japanese games there's a far wider market of titles and genres available, and that publishers are generally less blinkered and more open to 'taking a risk' on more original and imaginative games. I think Sega deserved a lot more success with the Dreamcast. What other developer would've brought the likes of *Sega Bass Fishing* (and the rod) and *Samba De Amigo* to PAL territories? It started a trend that's still









Looks like someone managed to hook themself an Xbox 360.

A little handheld loveliness.



being continued today, even by the likes of Sony with its *EyeToy* and *SingStar* ranges.

g™: So what is your favourite Dreamcast game and why?
GH: That's a really tough question as there are so many to choose from, *Samba De Amigo*, *Power Stone*, *Soul Calibur* and *Street Fighter 3* all stick out for me. Strangely enough, I'd have to say my favourite Dreamcast game of all, though, would have to be *Fire Pro Wrestling D*. Playing the eight-man Battle Royal with three friends is an unrivalled experience when it comes to pure fun, and the game just has so much depth to it with a pretty much infinite Create-A-Wrestler option.

g™: What's your most treasured item and why?
GH: Probably my two PAL *Samba De Amigo* boxsets. I got them both at launch and, although I've seen their values fluctuate to some quite large amounts on eBay, I'd never consider selling them as there's nothing else out there quite like it. I eagerly, and no doubt fruitlessly, await a true sequel…

g™: Ever discovered a real bargain?
GH: I have a UK copy of *Cotton* on the Neo Geo Pocket Color – complete and mint – which I'm told goes for about £40 now on eBay. It only cost me a tenner, so that was pretty good.

g™: Do you collect games as an investment or just to play them?
GH: I collect them purely to play them and enjoy them. I don't understand the appeal of collecting sealed games, and can't see where the enjoyment can come from having a wonderful game like *Metal Slug* or *Ikaruga* sitting sealed on a shelf. I have little time for these types of collectors, especially those who horde games purely to sell them on at a profit.

g™: You appear to have quite a few Sega titles; what's so special about them?
GH: My love affair with Sega began when I was a wee nipper and my parents would take me to the coast every year on holiday. I rarely saw any sun, sea or air, as I spent most days in the numerous arcades checking out all the latest games – *Golden Axe, Shinobi, AfterBurner* – I just loved the brash style of many of Sega's big Eighties hits. It's like each developer's games have a certain 'taste' to them, especially back in the glory days of arcade gaming. If you were to play a Sega game, a Capcom game or a Nintendo game without knowing who the developer was, you could, in actual fact, just TELL who had developed it. I guess I loved the 'taste' of Sega games. This continued for me through the 16-bit age and into the Saturn and Dreamcast eras.

g™: Will you pass up on a particularly rare title if it isn't in mint condition?
GH: No way. Of course I'd prefer the game to be in excellent condition, especially if it's one I've been after for some time, but I'd never pass up on a great game if it had a few scuffs or was missing the Spine card for example.

g™: What does your significant other think of your videogaming hobby?
GH: I'm quite fortunate because my girlfriend thinks it's great. Sometimes I can't drag her away from *Super Mario 3*, and somewhat frustratingly she's far better at it than I am! Perhaps when she sees me waving a couple of plastic maracas around to the beats of a dancing monkey she'll think differently.



We're glad to see Bomberman among Gavin's prized possessions.



A big Dreamcast and *Samba De Amigo* fan.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and there's something you'd like to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro Contact, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EQ. Or email: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

SHOCKED AND APPALLED

Oi games™!

What the hell is going on? I've only read through the first 50 games in your Top 100 Greatest Retro Games feature, and I'm already appalled beyond belief. How on God's green earth have classic titles such as *Chuckie Egg, Pac-Man, Defender, Sonic The Hedgehog, Space Invaders* and *Jet Set Willy* scored so poorly? These titles are all contenders for the top ten, yet are all struggling for recognition at the bottom end of the chart. Quite frankly this is appalling and it makes me want to seriously question what you actually think makes a classic retro game. I'm dreading to see what appears in the top ten. My guess is that it will be filled with dross such as *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Busby The Bobcat*, *Zool* and other games that people couldn't give a shit about. If *Elite* doesn't make it to the number one position there will be hell to pay…

Ryan Porter

Right then Ryan, while we can appreciate that you're rather upset (we had to delete most of your letter as it was too offensive), this poll has nothing to do with games™, we simply compiled the outcome for you. The feature looks at the Top 100 games as voted by you, the readers. You're bound to be upset with some of the results (we know we are) but in a way you've only got yourselves to blame.

ABOUT TIME TOO

Dear games™,

Well, you've taken your sweet-assed time about it – I've been reading since the first issue – but you've finally started a Top 100. While I was a little annoyed that some of my favourite games (*Final Fantasy Tactics, Chrono Trigger, Turrican* and *Stunt Car Racer* didn't exactly set the chart alight, a quick re-read of the intro reminded me that the list has actually been compiled by the readers, and not the staff on the magazine.

Bob Hall

Ah, finally someone who actually read the introduction to the feature. The games™ Top 100 Greatest Retro Games was compiled over a number of months from your votes and was not the product of our editorial staff putting games into a hat and picking them out. Obviously you're not going to agree with all of the people all of the time. But hey, a bit of healthy debate is always good.

ALL THE OUTRUN

Dear games™,

Just a quick line to say that I really enjoyed the *OutRun* feature that appeared in your *Animal Crossing* issue (I have the Winter cover). I've always been a huge fan of Sega's games, and the *OutRun* franchise is a particular favourite. I own many of the games that were featured, and it's a shame to admit that many of them weren't a patch on the original arcade hit. While I have *OutRun* as an unlockable on *OutRun2*, it doesn't appear to be quite as good as I remember it. Has the game really aged, or is there perhaps a better version available? If you could point me to an arcade-perfect port of the game I'd greatly appreciate it.

James Collier

Glad you liked the *OutRun* feature, James, and you're in luck, we can help you out with your request. In our opinion, the best home version of *OutRun* can be found on the *Sega Ages* compilation for the Sega Saturn. Unlike the Dreamcast editions (which the *OutRun2* version was apparently based on) it features all the original sprites and runs at a fair old pace as well. Best of all, it shouldn't set you back much more than £7.



So many *OutRuns*, so little time. Which version's best?

BEST OF THE BEST

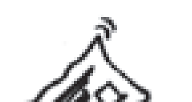
Dear games™,

I just wanted to say that I love the mag and read it whenever I can. I'm a huge fan of retro compilations, and wanted to know which ones you consider to be the best – I have a PAL Xbox, PS2 and a PSP. I understand that you've reviewed a few compilations recently, however you don't appear to have the issues they featured in. At the moment I'm looking at *Taito Legends*, *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* and *Tecmo Classic Arcade*.

Stephen Butcher

We've covered all the compilations you've mentioned, and the best by a proverbial country mile is *Taito Legends*. There's a fantastic array of hit titles on it including




STAR LETTER

LIVING LEGEND

Dear games™,

I just wanted to congratulate you on the superb Geoff Crammond interview that appeared in issue 39 of your magazine. I'm a massive fan of his work and started off playing *Revs* on my good old BBC Micro before moving onto the amazing *Stunt Car Racer* (a game I still find myself turning to today). As the article rightly pointed out, Crammond has an amazing eye for detail and creates incredibly good physics engines that really make you feel like you're in a Formula One racing car. What a legend.

In fact, if there's one thing that has disappointed me, it's that you didn't mention too much about *The Sentinel*. This was not only one of Crammond's greatest games, but also one that I became totally entranced with. If you could, perhaps, revisit this title at a later date I would really appreciate it.

John Phillips

We're glad you enjoyed the interview, John. We'd been trying to get Crammond into the magazine for ages, so it was wonderful when he finally agreed. Oh, and don't worry about *The Sentinel*; you may find a special feature all about it within these very pages sometime in the near future. If you don't ask, you don't get!

***Bubble Bobble*, *Rastan* and *The New Zealand Story*, plus you can normally pick it up for around a tenner. Compilations to look forward to in the future include the excellent *Taito Legends 2* for Xbox and PS2, and *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* for the PSP.**

HOME-BREW HOPEFULS

Dear games™,

Why don't you feature more home-brew reviews in your magazine? The PSP has a great selection of titles, including *Doom* and *DC Pang*, while the GBA has more games and emulators than you can shake a stick at. Then, of course, you have the GP32, Tapwave and the recently released GP2X, which all feature a superb array of applications. Surely a feature on home-brew is due in the magazine soon?

Sam James



Your wish is our command – look out for some home-brew reviews.

It's true we might not actually cover home-brew on a regular basis, but we don't exactly ignore it either. In last month's issue of Retro, for example, we featured an interview with Trevor Storey, one of the designers who worked on the recent *Total Eclipse* remake, and we've also covered home-brew in earlier issues of the magazine as well. Still, you're quite right a look at the GP2X sounds like a brilliant idea, especially as the emulators and applications are becoming a lot more stable these days.



The stuff dreams are made of. Keep an eye out for our Dreamcast feature.

A DREAM COME TRUE

Dear games™,

For God's sake cover Sega's Dreamcast in your retro section. I've bought your mag every month and so far, you've only given the machine and its games a few pages here and there. The Dreamcast was Sega's greatest ever machine, and everyone should be made aware of how special it was.

I noticed that you once devoted an entire retro section to Sony's PlayStation; in my opinion the Dreamcast is far worthier of this sort of attention. Just listen to this lot. *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, *Rez*, *Shenmue*, *Sonic Adventure*, *Phantasy Star Online*, *House Of The Dead 2*, *Crazy Taxi*. I could go on, but I'm sure you get the picture.

You've already started re-covering machines such as the SNES and Amiga 1200, so surely the Dreamcast has to be soon?

The biggest Dreamcast fan ever

We're fully aware that the Dreamcast is long overdue a bit of loving in the retro section, and now that we share the same office as Retro editor Darran we can nick all of his games. You'll see something very, very, soon. That's a promise. Just check out the Buyers' Guide on page 156 for a wee taster of Dreamcast loveliness. The wait will soon be over.















BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

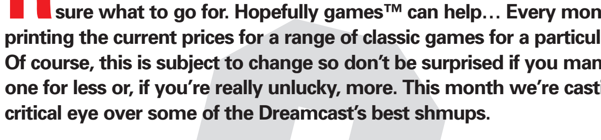
Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35



Right then – you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not really too sure what to go for. Hopefully games™ can help… Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less or, if you're really unlucky, more. This month we're casting our critical eye over some of the Dreamcast's best shmups.



Ikaruga

Estimated Price: £25-£40
Publisher: Treasure
Developer: Treasure

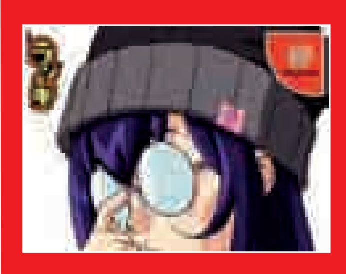
Treasure's *Ikaruga* is an interesting shooter as many gamers consider it to be as much a puzzle title as it is a shoot-'em-up. All the enemies and bullets are either black or white, and you can build up chains by shooting three enemies of the same colour. Your ship can also switch between the two colours and in doing so becomes impervious to bullets of the same colour. The end result is a staggeringly complex shooter that still endures to this day.



Radirgy

Estimated Price: £35
Publisher: Milestone
Developer: Milestone

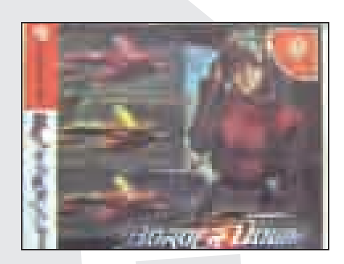
Radirgy is unique for several reasons. It's the only cel-shaded shoot-'em-up available on the Dreamcast, and it was recently released at the beginning of this year. Yep, the Dreamcast refuses to die, and *Radirgy* is further proof that the machine is still the console of choice for debuting hot, new shooters (G.Rev's *Under Defeat* has just hit Japan). Looking for an impressive introduction to DC shooters? *Radirgy* is the perfect place to start.



Border Down

Estimated Price: £40-£100
Publisher: G.Rev
Developer: G.Rev

In a sea of vertical Dreamcast shooters, *Border Down* stands alone. Don't let its orientation put you off; it's easily one of the console's greatest shooters and deserves a place in everyone's collection. It's certainly a tough title, but it's rescued by some superb aesthetics, wonderfully gripping gameplay and impressive boss encounters. It costs a fair old whack, though, so don't expect to see much (if any) change from a £50 note. The *Limited Edition* is an even prettier penny.



Psyvariar II: The Will To Fabricate

Estimated Price: £1-£6
Publisher: Skonec
Developer: Skonec

This barebones shooter (it lacks the extras of the PS2 and Xbox versions) remains one of the Dreamcast's most rewarding shoot-'em-ups. Like the *Castle Of Shikigami* series, the *Psyvariar* games reward you for grazing enemy bullets – the closer you fly toward them the higher your score. It's a wonderful system that highlights 'risk vs reward' like no other game. Yes, it's hard as nails, but that's just part of the learning process. Unmissable.



Giga Wing 2

Estimated Price: £25-£35
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Takumi

Giga Wing 2 is, without doubt, one of the most stunning looking shooters to ever appear on Sega's 128-bit console. Indeed, it's almost unrecognisable against the inferior looking *Giga Wing* although it does feature the same gameplay mechanics that made the original so enjoyable. Bung in a stunning orchestral soundtrack, a ridiculous amount of on-screen sprites and the ability to play with three other shooters, and *Giga Wing 2* easily stands out from its peers.



Mars Matrix

Estimated Price: £25-£30
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Takumi

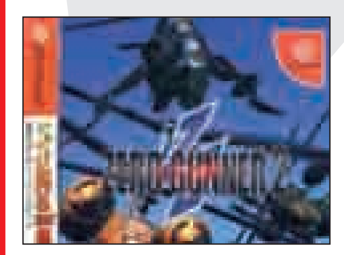
Like *Giga Wing* and its sequel, *Mars Matrix* was yet another Takumi/ Capcom collaboration and featured a similar bullet-sucking shield mechanic. While it's rather ugly looking, especially next to the radiant *Giga Wing 2*, it features superior gameplay and an amazing range of extras. Indeed, even an experienced shoot-'em-up will struggle to discover all of *Mars Matrix's* secrets, so if you like longevity in your games this is perfect.



Zero Gunner 2

Estimated Price: £25-£40
Publisher: Sega
Deverloper: Psikyo

All good shooters need a gimmick, and Psikyo's *Zero Gunner 2* is no exception. Rather than take control of conventional spaceships or jet fighters, Psikyo's shoot-'em-up places you in a state-of-the-art helicopter. What elevates it above other Dreamcast shooters, though, is your craft's unique ability to fire in any desired direction. This not only opens up the gameplay, it also gives the game a much greater level of depth. If only it was a little friendlier on the wallet…



Twinkle Star Sprites

Estimated Price: £40-£60
Publisher: SNK
Developer: SNK

Twinkle Stars Sprites has appeared on a variety of systems, but the Dreamcast outing is our favourite. Bog-standard shooter crossed with hectic puzzler, this requires you to shoot down waves of enemies that then transfer over to your foe's play field and hopefully take them out. With an all-new Dreamcast mode which eliminates the Neo Geo version's slowdown, and a sublime multi-player mode, *Twinkle Star Sprites* is an essential purchase.





ARKANOID: REVENGE OF DOH [Various Formats] Taito, 1987 – Original UK Advert


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

PS2

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £104.99



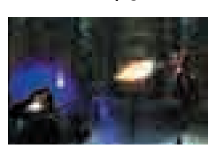
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PS2 is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PS2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi
Dragon Quest VIII IMPORT	Sony	Level-5
God Of War	Sony	In-House
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Rockstar North
Guitar Hero IMPORT	Red Octane	Harmonix
Ico	SCEE	In-House
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House
Rez	Sega	UGA
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House
Soul Calibur III	Sony	Namco
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	In-House
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Devil May Cry 3
The amazing return to form for the game that breathes new life into the series. Read the Special Edition review on page 128.



GTA: San Andreas
What more can be said about the greatest *GTA* in the series to date? Except that it continues to be a must-have PS2 game.



Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time
Luxurious environments and superb action-adventures are the order of the day in this first outing for our Prince. Damned good too.



PSP

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 1 September 2005
Media UMD Disc **Current Price** £179.99



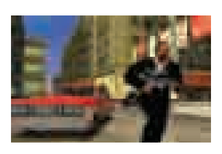
The PSP is a beautiful piece of hardware and its games portfolio has strengthened enormously in the months following the European release. Its gorgeous design and capability to play UMD movies has made it a huge success outside the traditional gaming market, too. Although it's very expensive for a handheld, its multimedia features justify the price.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PSP GAMES

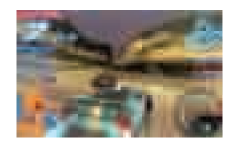
Title	Publisher	Developer
Ape Academy	Sony	In-House
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Exit	Ubisoft	Taito
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment
Madden NFL 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Mega Man Powered Up	Capcom	In-House
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios
Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	In-House
NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	In-House
NFL Street Unleashed	Electronic Arts	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	D3	Now Production
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco
Tokobot	2K Games	Tecmo
Untold Legends	Activision	SOE
Virtua Tennis	Sega	Sumo Digital
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House
WWE Smackdown! vs RAW 2006	THQ	Yuke's

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

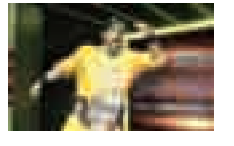
GTA: Liberty City Stories
One of the best reasons to own a PSP (along with *PES5*), *GTA* for the PlayStation Portable just doesn't get any better.



Ridge Racer
The classic racing series makes a triumphant debut on the PSP thanks to its exceptional port. A definite must-buy.



WWE Smackdown! vs RAW 2006
Can you trash talk? Are you gagging to lay the smackdown on your opponents? Another winner in the hugely successful *WWE* series.








EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 13 March 2002
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £99.99



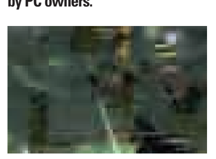
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is 'only a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

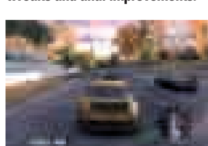
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion Studios
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat
This excellent do-or-die first-person shooter carries an intensity of combat that is loved by PC owners.



Forza Motorsport
This is for those who hanker after a more serious racer. The *GT4* of the Xbox with tons of tweaks and anal improvements.



Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow
The pinnacle of the wonderful *Rainbow Six* series, un-soured by the painful memory of *Lockdown*. An Xbox classic.



XBOX 360

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 2 December 2005
Media 4.5-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £279.99



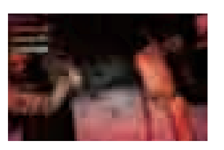
The Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long, but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag. Although we can't help feeling that the best is still to come, the Xbox 360's myriad Live functions and decent selection of first-wave titles make it worth sampling right now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX 360 GAMES

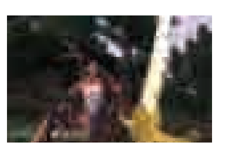
Title	Publisher	Developer
Amped 3	2K Sports	In-House
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft	In-House
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith
Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Tecmo
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Bethesda
FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House
Full Auto	Sega	Pseudo Interactive
Geometry Wars 2	Live Arcade	Bizarre Creations
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House
Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Rare
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	Crystal Dynamics
Marble Blast Ultra	Live Arcade	Garage Games Inc
NBA 2K6	2K Sports	In-House
Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	In-House
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
Quake 4	Activision	id Software
Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Namco

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

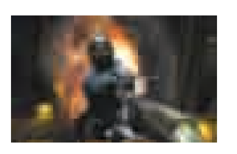
Condemned: Criminal Origins
A great first-person thriller – albeit a short one – that proved a huge hit thanks to cracking visuals and great gameplay.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
***Morrowind* was a tough act to follow but *Oblivion* pulled it off with some bells and whistles. A breathtaking game.**



Quake 4
One of the better launch titles, *Quake 4* combines an addictively good single-player game with classic multi-player action.



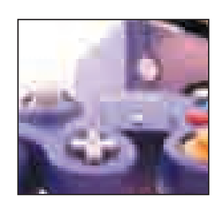
PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £79.99



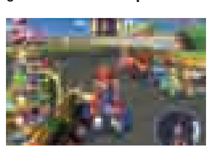
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle up against the other consoles, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth taking a look at. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

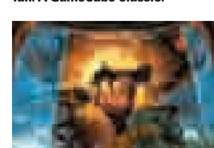
Title	Publisher	Developer
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth
Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	Skip
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
killer7	Capcom	In-House
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

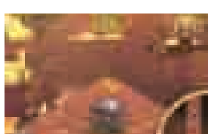
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
It's *Mario Kart* with double the fun in the classic GameCube title with all-new modes, items galore and LAN link-up.



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
Samus appears in the phenomenally great sequel to the original hit. Full-on first-person fun. A GameCube classic.



Super Monkey Ball 2
The ultimate party game with 150 new Main Game stages is back and everyone rightfully loves it. Who wouldn't like monkeys?



DS

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 11 March 2005
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



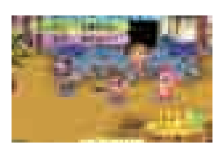
Chances are, you'll either already be completely in love with Nintendo's newest handheld or you'll have hated it from the start. The DS has dismissed misconceptions about it being nothing more than a gimmick by giving us a number of excellent games over the past year, and its affordability and accessibility have given it a sizeable advantage over the PSP.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE DS GAMES

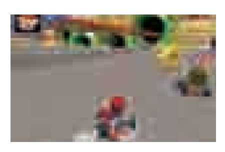
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House
Another Code	Nintendo	Jinx
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs
Lost In Blue	Konami	In-House
Mario And Luigi: Partners In Time	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment
Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	Fuse Games
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom
Sonic Rush	Sega	In-House
Tony Hawk's American Sk8land	Activision	Vicarious Visions
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Atlus	Atlus
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Clover
Wario Ware Touch	Nintendo	In-House
Yoshi Touch And Go	Nintendo	In-House
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Animal Crossing: Wild World
The irresistibly cute touch screen adventure where players just live life and make their own stories is addictive gaming.

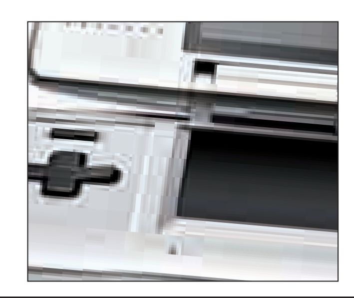


Mario Kart DS
It's *Mario Kart*, but on a smaller screen – splendid! The plumber and co are once again the must-have handheld title.



Yoshi Touch And Go
Yoshi and Baby Mario return in this fun-filled adventure as you guide Yoshi across the island using the stylus to defeat the enemies.





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



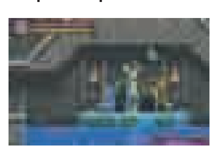
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GBA GAMES

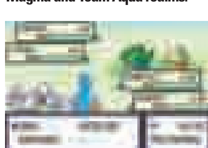
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

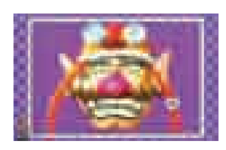
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow
It's the year 2035 as the series proves its versatility when Soma Cruz takes centre stage and must escape the vampire's castle.



Pokémon Emerald
An extension of the *Pokémon Ruby* and *Pokémon Sapphire* games with the goal to stop Team Magma and Team Aqua realms.



WarioWare: Twisted!
We really, really want this now. Right now, in fact. We really don't want to wait and neither should you. Fun and laughter await us both.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2006	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

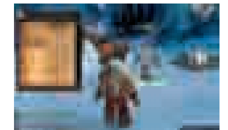
Battlefield 2
The award-winning *Battlefield* franchise arrived guns blazing as the series took to modern combat like an American to fast food.



Half-Life 2
Research scientist Gordon Freeman must defeat the alien invasion he unleashed in Valve's stunning FPS sequel. Legend.



World Of Warcraft
This is an MMORPG few will have forgotten. Literally thousands of players can interact within the same world. Must-have, indeed.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

STREET FIGHTER D-PAD COVER



Console: PSP
From: Capcom
Price: £35 approx (with game)
Available: Now

We live in an imperfect world, so it's no surprise that the lovely PSP is mildly less than perfect also. Anyone wishing to play beat-'em-ups and successfully pull off a Hadoken will be aware of the PSP's D-pad limitations, and will be overjoyed that there is now a cure.

Bundled up with *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max*, comes the D-pad cover that suddenly makes everything all right again. This simple bit of raised plastic means that at last, special moves are an option again and we can play these titles the way that was always intended.

On the downside, these are limited edition and only available in Japan at the moment, but we wouldn't be surprised if they make it to our shores soon – it's simply too good to miss out on if you're a beat-'em-up fan.

SONY PSP HEADSET



Console: PSP
From: Sony
Price: £19.99
Available: Now

We all know how nice it is when friends and strangers alike have the ability to openly mock you verbally; it's something that Live has taught us all. Now, thanks to the PSP headset, there is no escape from this special form of abuse. Although these headphones will be used as a regular pair on most current titles, *SOCOM: Fire Team Bravo* marks the start of an undoubted flurry of games that will be made even more fun once you can talk to the person you've just shot in the face. Although we've experienced the odd hiccup in 'transmissions', on the whole, this is a damn fine way to make decent games that little bit better.



DELL 5650 5.1 SURROUND SOUND SPEAKERS WITH SUBWOOFER



Console: PC
From: Dell
Price: £79.99
Available: Now

When playing atmospheric titles like *F.E.A.R.*, you need a decent set of speakers to really set the tone – unless you want to chance ruining the experience for yourself. There are plenty of expensive set-ups out there that will rip the bottom out of your wallet, but if you're on the lookout for decent quality sound, smooth looks, all accompanied by a low price tag, then this package does the job rather well. We've got ourselves a set now, and if you pay with one of those rare £80 notes, you have just enough change to do very little else that day except play *Half-Life 2*. Brilliant.

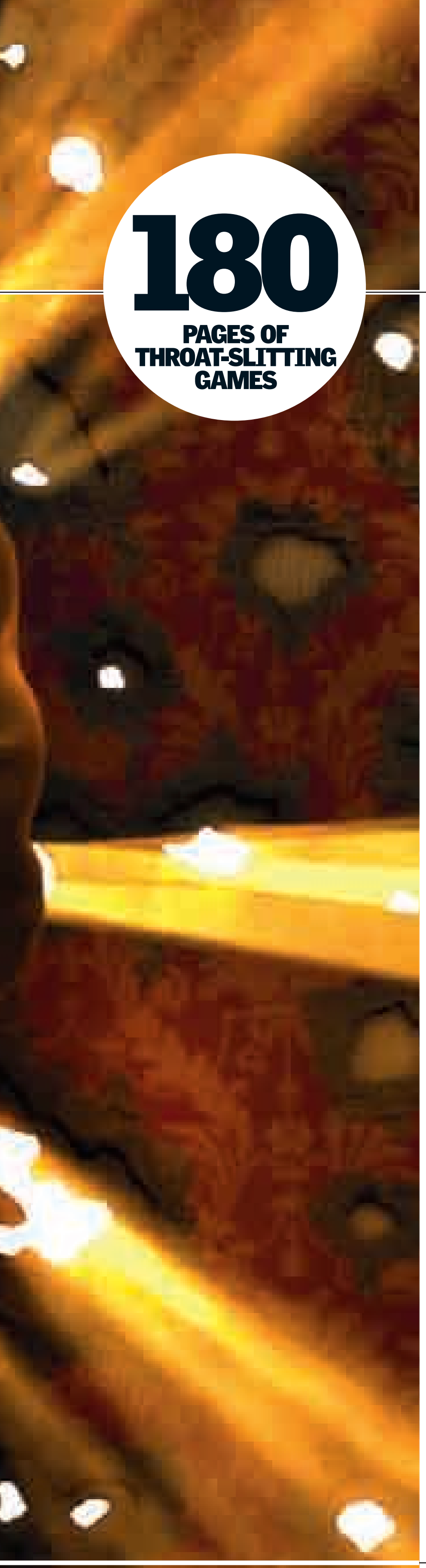

eMag



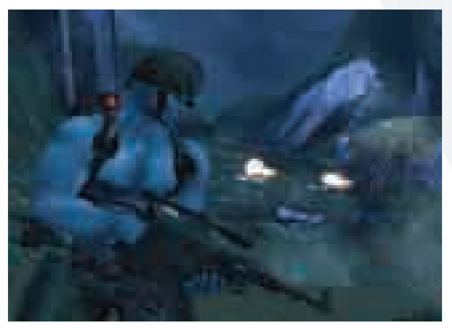
NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

Agent 47 has been waiting in the wings for quite some time now, but he's back, he's still bald and he wants your blood

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



NEXT MONTH

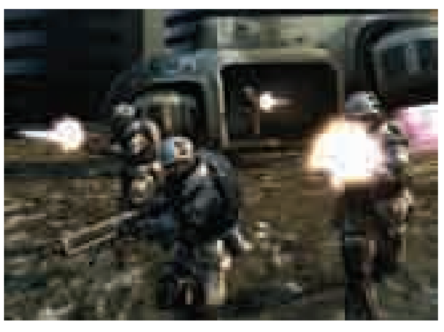


Rogue Trooper has the potential to be a standout comic book franchise.

MORE… REVIEWS

After delivering Lara to our door last month, Eidos is back in reviews country, offering three titles for your delectation. *Rogue Trooper* and *Urban Chaos* are followed by the shadowy figure of Agent 47 in the long-awaited *Hitman: Blood Money*. With *Unreal Tournament 2007* and *Scarface* making an appearance, it'll to be a busy month for reviews.

"BLOOD MONEY COULD WELL BE THE GREATEST HITMAN ADVENTURE YET"

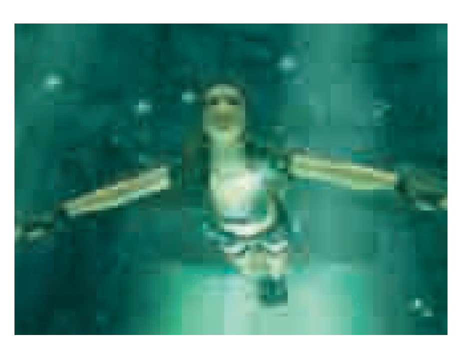


The *Battlefield 2142* crew look ready to take names and kick ass in EA's latest FPS.

MORE… PREVIEWS

E3 is so close we can smell the booth babes, but have no fear, we'll have all the gossip from the show as Americans gather in their thousands to ogle the latest next-gen titles. We'll also be taking a look at EA's futuristic *Battlefield 2142* and 2K Games' PS3 and 360 title, *The Darkness*. Throw in Eidos' next big hope, *Just Cause*, and there's plenty to look forward to.

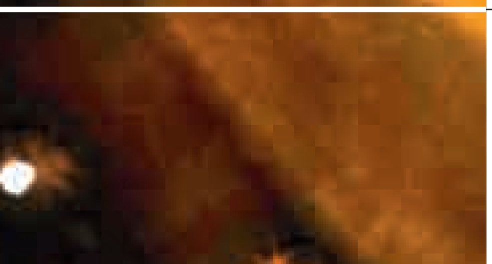
"THE XBOX HAS CHANGED THE WAY VIDEOGAMES ARE PERCEIVED FOREVER"



Toby Gard gives us the low-down on the evolution of gaming's most iconic character.

MORE… FEATURES

Along with the usual smattering of exclusive interviews and high-calibre retro goodness, **games™** will get the full low-down on the moving and shaking at this year's Games Developer's Conference. Plus, we'll be chatting to Toby Gard about life, love and Lara, and taking a look back to see how Microsoft and the Xbox have changed the gaming landscape.



ON SALE 18 MAY 06

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

I JUST WANTED to drop you a quick line and say how brilliant it was to see **games™** magazine back on the news stands this morning. I really thought the best games mag had died and I was going to be stuck with your mediocre rivals forever! Let's hope that your current problems are over and that issue 41 won't be the last.
Karl Liszewski

games™: Well, thanks for the kind words, Karl. It was certainly touch and go, for a moment there – even we thought our days were numbered – we felt, dizzy, nauseous, and our body parts were slowly becoming transparent, just like in *Back To The Future*.

Your letter was just one of many that we've received from concerned readers, and they both touched our hearts – it's nice to know we still have them after so many years of cynical scrutiny – and strengthened our resolve to continue to be the best videogames magazine in the business. Now hear this, your letter officially marks the end of the 'return of **games™**' backslapping festival. We're back and we're happy, so let's try to move on. All these compliments are starting to make us feel quite uneasy.

OKAY, WHERE THE hell is the coverage of the magical GP2X? I've had the pleasure of mine for over a month now and feel obliged to tell the rest of the world about how great it is.

It's truly unbelievable… I can play classic retro games, watch ANY movie (not just UMD discs that I already own on DVD) and even listen to music. And all for just £125. I can totally customise the user interface – I have some lovely Jessica Alba menu screens – and I can even develop my own software for it for free. It's a nice looking machine, the screen is big, and the sound is okay (especially with earphones). I have really good rechargeable batteries, so the battery life is not an issue, and you can get a 1Gb SD card really cheaply from Amazon.

Don't believe any of the bad press you may have heard about it crashing all the time; mine works perfectly. Sure, it may be a copyright/piracy nightmare, but you're a games magazine and it plays games! You don't have to promote piracy or copyright infringement, just give it a fair review and some well deserved coverage.
Gary Moore

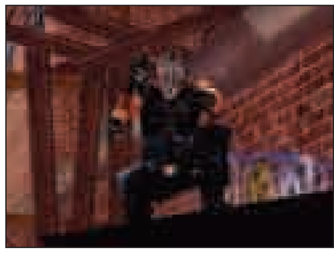
games™: Now, that's a suspicious amount of enthusiasm you have for the GPX2 there, Gary. If we were so inclined we might have accused you of being a sales representative for the company, desperate to drum up some press. But we're not, so we won't.

Rest assured that your 'dream machine' will be fully covered some time in the not too distant future, but what with Xbox 360, PSP, DS Lite and PlayStation3 rumours to cover, we have been forced to prioritise. So until then, you can count this letter as coverage of sorts, and you wrote it so that's two reasons to be cheerful. We'll let you get back to your Jessica Alba menu screens now – it must be exhausting playing all of those retro games with just the one hand.

"ALTHOUGH **VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES** LIKE **MANHUNT** ARE NOT AIMED AT THE **YOUNGER POPULATION, THE PRESS HAS CREATED** AN ATMOSPHERE OF **FEAR** RATHER THAN THAT OF **HEALTHY DEBATE AND DISCUSSION**"



GP2X, all-in-one media revolution or just an unreasonably excited reader? Answers on a postcard.



Yes, it's true, there will be another *Urban Chaos* game. Can you contain your excitement?

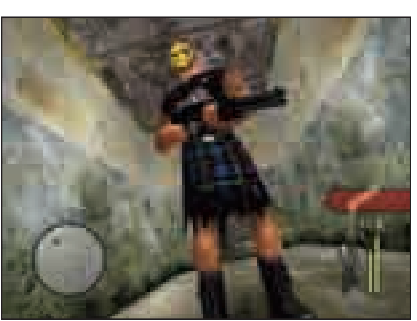
Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

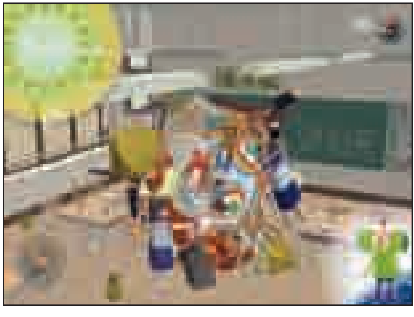
games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EQ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address:
gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk





Rockstar's *Manhunt* is being blamed for a high profile murder? Well, we really can't imagine why.



The Japanese: purveyors of all things, bright, loud and completely and utterly barking mad, we salute you!

I READ YOUR preview of *Urban Chaos* in issue 41 with a little confusion. Not because I didn't understand the content, but because Eidos released a frankly terrible game of the same name, where you played as a female cop, back in 2000-ish. As Eidos is also releasing this new title called *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*, do you have any idea whether it will follow the same continuity as the previous game, or is the company simply getting as much money as it can out of a pre-existing trademark?

If re-using a long-forgotten name saves money on registering new trademarks, it would be interesting to see how many other companies have recycled trademarks from previous flops.

Ed Carmody

games™: In response to your original query, no, *Riot Response* doesn't seem to follow the original *Urban Chaos* storyline. First of all, you play as Nick Mason – obviously a man – so its unlikely that it will be exactly the same, though we would wager that some elements will be very similar. Either way, it's certainly an interesting point.

Very often, the use of an existing trademark won't be to save money on registering a new one, although it can be very useful when cashing in on the success, however limited, of any previous title. *Final Fight: Streetwise* is a fine example of a new product made under a trusted banner, that bore little resemblance to the series it was supposed to be a part of.

Today's market is so saturated with products that any way of making a game more distinctive will inevitably be capitalised upon by developers – it just makes sense. Whether Eidos' decision to release a first-person shooter based in 'a future taken over by gang warfare' – because we're really in need of another one of those – under the name of an existing, sub-par game will yield mind-blowing results is unlikely. Then again, if you hated the first one, you probably thought that already.

I'M A STUDENT, and as part of my final year dissertation, I am conducting an investigation into the relationship between the British press and violent videogames. I would be greatly appreciative if you could help me with my research.

I have been interested in covering this topic ever since I began following the *Daily Mail's* reports of the Stefan Pakeerah murder in which the killer, Warren LeBlanc, was said to have been influenced by the game *Manhunt* which is published by Rockstar. The sensationalist coverage of this tragic event resulted in vital evidence being left largely

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Text Life

Heard the one about the German Shepherd?
gTM: This is a sophisticated gaming magazine, not the back room of The Dog & Duck. And yes we have. It's rubbish.

DS Lite? Is smaller better, or just smaller?
gTM: We're certain that smaller is smaller, but we don't think it's necessarily better. Unless you're in a limbo competition, in which case it is.

Wouldn't a Mario vs Sonic game be brilliant?
gTM: The answer was 'no' in 1993, and it's still 'no' now. Time to move on we think.

How long before we get 9/11: The Game?
gTM: We hope this is one of those 'when hell freezes over' situations.

Is there a gamer alive who doesn't love Jessica Alba?
gTM: Opinion is sharply divided between goddess and no-talent hack, but it's a step-up from Lara Croft. At least she's real.

OutRun 2 – 8 out of 10? A little generous?
gTM: And what exactly do you expect us to say in response to that? "Yes?" There's such thing as journalistic integrity you know?

How do you sleep at night?
gTM: In a house made entirely from discarded Dreamcast boxes, on a mattress stuffed with PS3 press releases.

I know where you live?
gTM: Oh good, because we can't remember. Can you send us the address. We've been sleeping in our desk drawers.



Can *Time Crisis* make you a crack shot? Will *Gran Turismo* make you a better driver? If a frog had wings would it bump its ass when it hopped?



Brains? Talent? Beauty? No, no and yes. One out of three ain't bad, not that the gaming public actually cares.

overlooked, and I believe that the fact that a newspaper such as the *Daily Mail* (and others) read by the mass population of Britain could fail to print this information is fundamentally damaging to the reputation of gaming and gamers everywhere.

My hypothesis is that although these violent games are not aimed at the younger population, the press has created an atmosphere of fear when it comes to videogames, rather than that of healthy debate and discussion. If it is possible, I would be incredibly grateful if you could offer a quick comment about this topic.

Steven Lambert

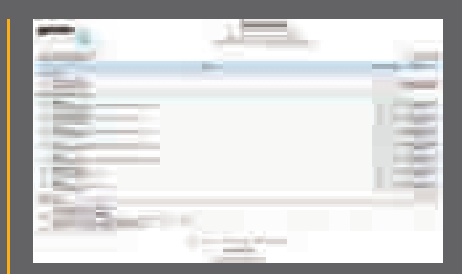
gamesTM: It sounds like you're doing pretty well all by yourself, Steven, but needless to say the old videogame violence chestnut can never linger too far from our minds. The middle-class conservative view, as represented by the *Daily Mail*, would have us believe that street crime, the collapse of the family unit, and the feeling of isolation that pervades modern existence can all roughly be blamed on *Grand Theft Auto*. Oh, and remember, it has exactly nothing to do with the ruthless capitalist system that made all of the *Daily Mail*'s readers middle-class conservatives in the first place.

You are quite correct in your assertion that such treatment has made it difficult for intelligent research and debate to take place because, in truth, the world remains relatively clueless about how much games can and are affecting those who spend long periods of time 'exposed' to them. All theorists agree that games will inevitably have a behavioural effect on heavy users, particularly as they grow in realism and immersion, but few can deduce whether that effect is good or bad, and to what degree.

That *Manhunt* is responsible for a murder is clearly a ridiculous claim, just as similar accusations made against films such as *The Matrix* and *Child's Play* were. In our opinion, videogaming is the most important and innovative form of entertainment in the modern world, a status that grows everyday. Its power of influence and coercion is far subtler than the *Daily Mail* could possibly comprehend or would even consider newsworthy, and anything that hinders the study of the nature of those powers can only be a bad thing.

FIRST OFF, GAMESTM, keep up the good work. Second, how about a feature on Koei? I've just started playing *Makai Kingdom* – which is excellent – and realised that I have seen the name Koei before. I have a collection of Mega Drive games that included *Uncharted*





FROM THE FORUM

GAMES, GUNS AND FAST CARS

Waters and *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*. I also found out that there were many other strategy and role-playing games that Koei had something to do with. Maybe we shouldn't be surprised about Koei's expertise in this area? What do you think?
Andrew Sale

games™: Why would 'we' be surprised? Now, there's a baffling comment. Quite how 'we' could be surprised about this when we've never seen/heard/met you before is making our heads hurt. Koei was founded in 1978 and has since built up a formidable reputation with a massive range of games on all formats, including *Dynasty Warriors* and, as you mentioned in your letter, *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*. We're fairly sure we've never said anything to discourage this notion, but if you'd like to put us right, Andrew, we'd be only too happy to listen.

As for the feature you have requested, our The Players section exists specifically to give you the low-down on all the movers and shakers in the videogames world. However, the content is almost always motivated by what is being released, so keep an eye out for Koei's next big game and we'll see what we can do. Though to be honest, your 'surprise' at Koei's expertise may well have hurt their feelings. Games developers are people too, you know?

I'M CAUGHT in a moral dilemma; I wonder if **games™** can help. I love videogames and count *Parappa The Rapper*, *Bishi Bashi Special* and, more recently, *Katamari Damacy* among my all-time favourites. Friends of mine often sneer at my taste in games, calling them 'your typical Japanese weirdness', but this statement strikes me as wholly ignorant and even slightly racist. I find all of these types of titles to be fun, exciting and packed with an imagination that is sorely lacking in most videogames. Are my companions really so blind, or do their comments have the ring of truth?
Sally Beevor

games™: While saying that the Japanese themselves are weird could well be seen as racist, saying that their games are is merely an observation with more than a ring of truth to it, so cease your moral – or should that be ethical – dilemma. While Japanese developers have produced many great games of all kinds, some of their products are invested with a certain distinct 'flavour' that isn't in evidence almost anywhere else in the world. It's no bad thing because, as you rightly point out, these games are very often riotous and inspired fun, and their Japanese-ness is exactly what makes them so great.

Just like the angry young men of British cinema, the bombastic destruction of Hollywood, or the permissive philosophising of French movies, a country's national identity is often revealed through its art, and videogames are no different. If your friends want to deprive themselves of *Katamari Damacy* go ahead and then let them – it's their loss after all. But don't worry about your friends being racists, worry about their taste in games, instead, yes?

"FRIENDS SNEER AT MY TASTE IN VIDEOGAMES, CALLING THEM **YOUR TYPICAL JAPANESE WEIRDNESS** BUT I FIND THESE TITLES TO BE **FUN, EXCITING** AND PACKED WITH **AN IMAGINATION** THAT IS **SORELY LACKING IN MOST GAMES"**

Bondvillain2k
I've just been in a bar with my girlfriend, and she watched me play *Time Crisis* on one of the machines. I reached stage three, but when I finished I turned around and Becky was looking at me in an 'Eep' kind of way. She said it worried her what a natural shot I was.

I said that it was most likely games honing my hand-eye co-ordination, but it is a bit weird to become good at shooting people (virtual characters, I know, but it's still aiming a gun).

Anyone else had any weird, 'erk, I could do that?' revelations?

DADDYCOOL
Hopefully a spot of *Shenmue* will help me through my forklift test. Good point, though, I mean, rookie racing drivers use games like *Gran Turismo* to learn the circuit before taking the real car out.

wholehole
That's a little different, though. Those tracks are perfect representations of the real thing. No shooting game will ever be able to recreate shooting a real gun. Being good at *Time Crisis* definitely doesn't mean you'll be a crack shot in the real world. Bad guys don't just run out and stand still. The recoil from a standard pistol would probably throw your arm out of its socket if you held it wrong. Aiming a real gun is very difficult and bullets hurt.

Illdog
I once read an article (it may have been in an old issue of **games™**) about a young man who avoided a serious road accident by swerving his car onto the other side of the road instinctively. His dad was with him in the car and, even though he had been driving for years, he said he would never have thought to do what his son did in a split second.

Now the son is an avid videogames fan, and more so an avid driving games fan because he likes to believe it was his favourite past time that saved he and his dad from harm. Seems plausible to me.

darthjim
I definitely learned a lot about car control from playing the likes of *Gran Turismo*. Had a couple of near misses, though, when road conditions aren't quite like the tracks in game, so if I wind up stuffed in a wall one day, you'll know why...
I've never been paintballing, but I'd like to think my deadeye *Time Crisis*/*House Of The Dead* skills would be a help. Of course, I'd probably end up splattered from head to foot, but I'd like to keep my illusions for a while.




games™